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WHAT HAPPENED AT OLENBERG

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What happened at Olenberg

by

Clifford Howard

illustrated by Emile A. Nelson.

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WHAT HAPPENED AT OLENBERG

CHAPTER I

THE MYSTERIOUS STRANGER

It was early Saturday afternoon, and most of the people of Olenberg were gathered about on the public square in front of the village inn. That is what they did every Saturday afternoon, if the weather was good; and the weather was not often bad in Olenberg, for it was such a peaceful little place and was tucked away so close against the mountains, that the storms had a hard time finding it. Saturday was always a holiday, and whenever there was a holiday in Olenberg all the young folks put on their best clothes and came to the village square to dance on the big lawn that was in the center of the square, while all the old women sat around on benches under the trees and

talked and knit and ate krullers, and all the old men sat around and fell asleep or smoked pipes, and drank cider or raspberry vinegar according to what time of year it was.

On the edge of the lawn was a small platform, and sitting on the platform were two musicians. One of them was playing a fiddle and the other a clarinet, and, as they played, the dancers on the grass went skipping two by two, holding hands, and all singing together:

"Fair Olenberg, dear Olenberg,
Why do we love you so?
Because it is at Olenberg
That pretty maidens grow—
That pretty maidens grow;
Because it is at Olenberg
That this is really so.

So let us sing, tra la, tra lo,
And never think of sorrow.
We 'll dance to-day, hi-o, hi-o,
And go to church to-morrow.

Fair Olenberg, dear Olenberg,
Why do we sing of you?
Because it is at Olenberg
That naughty boys are few—
That naughty boys are few;
Because it is at Olenberg
That this is really true.

So let us sing, tra la, tra lo,
And never think of sorrow.
We 'll dance to-day—"

All at once everybody stopped singing. A man on horseback had come galloping down the street and stopped in front of the inn. It was not often that a stranger came to town, so that even if this one had been only an ordinary traveler everybody would have turned to look at him and wonder who he was and where he came from. But everyone saw at once that this was not an ordinary man that had come galloping into the square.

He sat bolt upright like a general, and his clothes sparkled with gold braid and silver buttons, while his beautiful brown horse was covered with spangles and the most gorgeous kind of trappings. He wore a monstrous purple hat with a big white ostrich plume over the top of it. Underneath the hat he had a very red face with an enormous black mustache that turned straight up at each end and gave him a very fierce expression. His coat was scarlet and his trousers were blue, and his high yellow boots shone like oilcloth and had silver spurs on their heels. Wrapped around his waist was a broad white sash, from which two big

pistols could be seen poking out, while at his side hung a sword all glittering with gold and diamonds and large enough to cut off an ox's head.

It is no wonder that the young folks stopped their dancing and that the old folks sat up and rubbed their eyes. Nobody just like this had ever before been seen in Olenberg. He was such a magnificent sight and such an unusual sight, that everyone remained stock still and stared at him—that is, everyone except the old fiddler on the little platform. He was partly deaf and when he played he always shut his eyes and thought of other things; so of course he did not notice that anything had happened, and instead of stopping to stare like everybody else he kept right on fiddling and thinking of other things.

The man on the horse did not look either to the right or to the left, but rode straight up to the door of the inn. On one side of the door was a broad wooden bench with a high back, and sitting on the bench were the inn-keeper and the village constable. They had both been taking a nap and looked very comfortable,

each with his legs stretched out in front of him and his hands folded on his stomach. The constable, whose name was Bumble, was a short man with brass buttons and a large nose. The inn-keeper was also a short man, but he was much older than the constable and had a different kind of nose. He had very little hair, but he made up for it by having a good many wrinkles; and his name was Pappy Grimm. What his first name really was nobody seemed to know, although he himself said he believed it was Ebenezer. But as far back as anybody could remember he was always called "Pappy," and whenever he had to sign his name he always wrote it "P. Grimm." Besides being the inn-keeper he was also the postmaster and the tax collector; so that next to the burgomaster himself he was the most important person in the village.

When the strange man on horseback came clattering up to the door, both Pappy Grimm and Constable Bumble were so startled that they almost slid off the bench. They were not expecting anything like this; and all at once to wake up and behold such a high and

mighty person, with a purple hat and a big black mustache, glaring down at them from a prancing horse, was enough to frighten them. And before either of them could say anything the stranger frightened them still more by suddenly roaring out at them,

"Ho, you lazy bandy legs! where is the burgomaster?"

They felt sure he must be a nobleman of some kind, for no ordinary person was ever dressed like that or

talked in such a manner. In fact, they did not know but that perhaps he might be a king. But, whatever he was, they both scrambled to their feet and took off their hats and made a low bow. Indeed, to tell the truth, the constable bowed so very low that he could hardly straighten up again. The man on the horse, however, paid no attention to all this politeness. He seemed very impatient, and rattling his sword with a big noise he shouted out again,

"I tell you I wish to see the burgomaster!—at once!—this very minute!"

From the way this great man talked to them, Pappy Grimm and Constable Bumble felt that they were to blame for something, and they both said "Excuse me."

The rider gave a fierce snort, and his face grew redder than ever. "Have you lost your wits?" he shouted, looking straight at Pappy Grimm. "How many times must I tell you I wish to see the burgomaster? Call him at once!"

Pappy Grimm gave a little jump. "Yes, Your

Highness—Your Grace," he stammered—"Yes, to be sure—I will call him right away—won't we, Bumble?"

"Yes," said the constable, "we will fly;" and putting on his hat he was about to start off up the street when the man on the horse stopped him.

"Where is the burgomaster?" he asked.

"He is up at his house, sir, if you don't mind," answered the constable, again taking off his hat.

"Then I will go myself," said the stranger. "Show me which house is his."

"You see that red house up there, on the right-hand side of the street, with a green fence around it?" said the constable, pointing with his finger.

The rider screwed his eyes into a scowl and looked up the street from under his big hat. "You mean that house with the two red chimneys?" he growled.

"No, sir, if you please, sir," replied the constable, making another bow and trying not to look frightened; "if you don't mind, sir, I mean the one with the big yellow chimney."

The rider scowled more fiercely than ever. "Why did n't you tell me that at first?" he snorted, and he turned his horse around with an angry jerk. "Yes, I see now which place you mean—the one with a hitch-post in front of it. So that 's the burgomaster's house, is it?"

"Why—why, no, sir, not exactly," stammered the constable, looking now as though he were about to cry; "I—I was just going to tell you, kind sir, if you don't mind, sir, that the burgomaster's house is the one next to that."

"And look out for the dog," said Pappy Grimm. "Don't be afraid, though, if he bites; he ain't mad."

But the great man with the purple hat and the silver spurs did not wait to hear this bit of warning. He was already off and away, galloping up the street toward the burgomaster's house as hard as he could speed.

The constable and the postmaster and all the rest of the villagers in the square stood perfectly still and watched him go. Many of them even held their

breath. They had never seen anything quite so grand —not even a circus rider. He went so fast and bounced so high and made such a rattle and a sparkle with his sword and his spurs and his shiny boots, that some of the dogs began to howl just as they did when they heard good music. And when he stopped in front of the burgomaster's house, everybody stood on tip toe to see him jump from his horse and go in at the gate. And then, when he had disappeared in the garden, they all took a deep breath and looked at one another.

Who was this great man? Where did he come from? What did he want with the burgomaster? What did it all mean? These were the questions that everybody began now to ask everybody else. The young people forgot all about their dancing and the fathers and mothers forgot all about their knitting and their naps and everything else. Even the old fiddler had stopped playing by this time, and he came scrambling down from the platform to join the others as they gathered around the constable and Pappy Grimm to talk over the matter. In fact, they crowded around

so close, pushing and squeezing and all talking at once, that Constable Bumble buttoned up his coat and said that if they did n't stop their racket he would arrest somebody. The constable felt himself very important because he had spoken with the wonderful man that everybody was so curious about.

"But who is this high and mighty person?" called out several voices together.

"I don't know his name," answered the constable; "I did n't think to ask him. But this much I can tell you: he is a nobleman and a very great man!"

At this everybody said, "Aha, I told you so!"

"But what brings such a great man to this little village?" asked a dozen persons at the same time.

"I don't know exactly," replied the constable; "I did n't think to ask him. But I can tell you this: it must be mighty important business; *mighty* important! Ain't that so, Pappy?"

Pappy Grimm rubbed his hands together and looked unusually wise and serious.

"Fellow citizens," he said, looking slowly all

around, "let me say to you, that as long as I have lived in Olenberg I have never before known anything like this to happen. I cannot think what it means. It is very remarkable; very remarkable indeed."

As he said this all the old people nodded their heads as much as to say, "That 's so;" and Constable Bumble, shaking his finger, added in a very solemn voice, "Yes; and you ought to have heard how he asked for the burgomaster; and you should have *seen* him when he did it. Mark my word, he has brought some tremendous news. Something great is going to happen!"

"But what can it be? whatever can it be?" asked everybody at once. And just then a little boy who had climbed up a tree shouted out: "Look! There he is again! He's saying good-bye to the burgomaster!"

Everybody turned and looked up the street. Sure enough, there was the gor-

geous nobleman making ready to mount his horse; and standing by the gate was the burgomaster making the most magnificent bows. Without once turning his head the nobleman sprang into his saddle and went riding away toward the mountains as hard as he could go, while the burgomaster remained by the gate bowing and bowing like a perfect gentleman until the rider had gone clear out of sight and there was nothing to be seen of him but a little cloud of dust away off in the distance.

"And now for the news!" shouted everybody. "The burgomaster will tell us the news! See, he is coming down the street. But, dear me! how excited he looks. Upon my word, I believe he is going to burst! Just look at his eyes! Mercy on us! he must have wonderful news for us. Hooray! hooray for the news!"

And in the midst of the shouting and excited handclapping, Constable Bumble bustled about, shaking his stick and calling out, "Hold your tongues! First thing you know I 'll arrest somebody!" But nobody paid any attention to him. The people were all too

much excited waiting for the burgomaster to come and tell them the news. And so they kept right on clapping their hands and jumping up and down and calling out, "Hooray! Hooray for the news!"

CHAPTER II

WONDERFUL NEWS

The burgomaster was the chief magistrate of the village. He had the finest house in Olenberg and had more money than anybody and was also fatter and had bigger ears than anybody else. He always wore a blue velvet coat with pearl buttons and carried a gold-headed cane; and now as he came down the street his long coat tails were spread out behind him and he thumped his cane hard on the pavement, for he was walking unusually fast and everybody could see he was very greatly excited. His fat cheeks were quite red and his hat was on crooked, and if he had been pushing a wheelbarrow full of potatoes he could not have puffed any harder than he did now.

Many of the villagers could not wait until he got into the square, but ran to meet him, crying out, "Tell us the news, dear burgomaster! Who was he? What

did he come for? What is it all about? Tell us; tell us!"

But the burgomaster merely waved his hand, as much as to say, "Get out of my way," and kept right

on without saying a word until he came up to the inn. By the time he stopped everybody had crowded about him; men, women and children, all anxious to hear the news. And they made such a hubbub and crowded so

close, that Constable Bumble had to rush in with his stick.

"Hold your tongues!" he commanded. "What 's the matter with you! Stop your pushing there, Ben Schneider! and here, you, Sally Applejack, come down off that bench! Now get back here, everybody, and stop your rumpus! How can the burgomaster speak with such a racket in his ears? Shame on you! First thing you know I 'll arrest somebody!"

"But we want to hear the news," cried the people. "Oh, please, dear burgomaster, do tell us the news."

"Silence!" commanded the burgomaster all at once; and he said it with such a roar and did it so suddenly and puffed out his cheeks with such a tremendous snort, that everyone became still in a moment, except two little boys who started to cry.

For a minute or two he did not say another word. He just stood still and glared about him, breathing hard and swelling out his fat cheeks like a hop-toad. And all the people remained perfectly quiet, waiting for him to speak and tell them the news.

But instead of doing that he suddenly held up his cane and said, "Begone! What are you standing around here for? Go away!"

"Oh, but dear burgomaster," called out several voices, "we want to hear the news! Do, please, tell us the news."

"No," snapped the burgomaster, stamping his cane on the ground; "not now; not now, I tell you! I must have time to think. Don't stand around here! Go home now, everyone of you!"

Some of the villagers did start home, although they were dreadfully disappointed; but a good many of them just would not go. "Ah, dear burgomaster; please, dear burgomaster," they begged, still crowding about him; "please tell us the news. Oh, please do! Tell us just a little; just a little teency-weency bit."

But the burgomaster cut them short by striking his cane against the back of a bench with such a loud whack that everybody jumped. "Pickles and cheese!" he roared, "what sort of behavior is this? Have n't I told you that I won't tell you what I am not going to

tell you? When I am ready to speak, then I speak; but not before—not one minute before! So be off! Not another word! Off with you, or Constable Bumble here will take charge of you!"

"Yes," said Constable Bumble, waving his stick. "Next thing you know, somebody 's going to be arrested!" and he and the burgomaster together looked so determined, that nobody dared to say another word or wait around any longer, and it was not many minutes before there was no one left in the square except the burgomaster and the constable and old Pappy Grimm.

Wiping his face with a large red handkerchief, the burgomaster sat down on the big bench by the inn. "Pots and kettles!" he exclaimed, talking aloud to himself and still making a puffy noise as he breathed, "I should say they would like to hear the news. The most astonishing news they will hear in many a day! But let them have patience; let them have patience. This is not the time and place to tell such news as this. Crackers and cucumbers, what are they thinking about!

Great news like this must be told in a proper manner. It must be done with ceremony; with ceremony. We must have a meeting, in the town hall. I must make a speech; a grand speech. You hear what I say, Bumble?—I must make a speech!"

"Yes," said the constable, who was sitting close by on the doorstep with Pappy Grimm; "yes, good burgomaster, I heard you say so;" and as he spoke he leaned forward, rubbing his hands together; and so did Pappy Grimm, each hoping to hear something more.

The burgomaster was not puffing quite so hard by this time. He was getting calmer. He fixed his hat on straight and adjusted his spectacles. Then leaning on his cane he looked at the constable. "Bumble," he said, speaking in a low, mysterious voice, as though he was about to tell him something.

"Yes, sir, I am here," answered Bumble.

"And Pappy Grimm," said the burgomaster, looking at the inn-keeper and speaking in the same mysterious voice.

"Yes," answered Pappy Grimm; "what is it?"

The burgomaster looked at both of them for a minute without speaking. Then he said: "You are both old friends of mine, are you not?"

"To be sure we are," they answered together.

"And can you keep a secret?" he asked, speaking in a whisper.

"To be sure we can," they both answered in a whisper.

"Because, you see," said the burgomaster, "I want to keep this a secret until I make my speech. It must be a surprise to the village folks. They must not know anything beforehand."

"Of course not," said the constable; "that would never do. But being as we are old friends, you will tell it to us. Ain't that so, Pappy?"

"To be sure," answered the postmaster, again rubbing his hands together; "to be sure; to be sure."

"Well, then," said the burgomaster, speaking in a very low whisper and leaning over toward the doorstep, "what would you say if I were to tell you that the great nobleman who has just been here to see me, is

the Baron von Dunderkrout, secretary and messenger extraordinary to His Imperial Highness the Exalted Prince of Burgeldorf? Hey, what would you say?" and the burgomaster held up his finger in a most knowing and confidential way.

Pappy Grimm opened his wrinkled eyes very wide. "Well, well," he said, "you don't tell me! Upon my word, I am astonished!" And Constable Bumble could scarcely say anything, he was so much impressed with the big, high-sounding title of the nobleman. He repeated it over to himself, very slowly and very solemnly—"Baron von Dunderkrout, secretary and messenger extraordinary to His Imperial Highness the Exalted Prince of Burgeldorf. Well, if that don't beat all! And what in the world did he come for? What did he say to you?"

The burgomaster began to puff again. "Bumble," he whispered, "it is the most astonishing thing you ever heard! It will make your hair stand on end. You will get excited. I got excited. Perhaps you noticed it. I was never so surprised and excited in all

my life. It is going to set the people crazy when I tell them. Gas and molasses! I can hardly yet believe it myself. It puts me all in a stew when I think about it!"

"For the land's sake!" burst out Pappy Grimm, "what can it be?"

"Yes, for goodness sake, don't keep us waiting!" exclaimed the constable. "Out with it; out with it!"

"No, not now; not now," answered the burgomaster, trying to look firm. "You must not ask me. As a friend, I would not mind telling you; but as the burgomaster of the village it would not be right. It would not be fair to the rest of the people. I cannot tell it to some and not to others. No, no; have patience. Wait until I make my speech. Everyone then will hear it at once. That is the only right way. The burgomaster must set a good example. Have patience until I can tell the wonderful news to the village in a grand public speech. Until then it must be a secret; a state secret."

"But remember," said Bumble, "I am the constable,

and the constable of the village ought to know everything. Ain't that so, Pappy?"

"Yes," replied Pappy Grimm, "that *is* so. And you must also remember, good burgomaster, that I am the postmaster, and the postmaster ought certainly to know everything, too."

The burgomaster scratched his head. "Perhaps you are right," he said; "perhaps you are right. This is official business, and as you are both village officials, I suppose you have a right to know what it is."

"Why, to be sure," declared the constable. "That 's according to law; and I guess I ought to know the law. Ain't that so, Pappy?"

"To be sure!" answered Pappy Grimm. "There is no doubt about it."

The burgomaster blew his nose with a pompous blast. "Yes," he said, "I believe that is the law; and therefore I must tell you the news. It is my duty. But, of course, you will promise me not to breathe a word of it to anyone—not a word."

They were just about to give their promise when

they were interrupted by the town crier who came walking around the corner. He was a tall, thin man, with a pointed nose and a very sad face; and his name was Pretzel. He looked a good deal thinner and a

good deal sadder than he really was, because he always wore a long brown coat, tightly buttoned up, and a high silk hat with hardly any brim to it. The boys of the village called his hat a "stovepipe," but Pretzel

said that was not the right name for it. His business in the village was to go about through the streets every day, calling out the news, giving notice of meetings and announcing when it was time to go to bed. He always carried a big bell with him, which he would ring from time to time to let folks know he was around; and although his voice was not very sweet he had a habit of singing little songs which he himself composed. There was not much tune to them, but as he did not often sing them very loud they seldom disturbed anybody. He was singing one of them now, as he came walking around the corner, and this is the way it went:

"Oh, the daffodils are smiling in the lane, in the lane,
Where I used to go and paddle in the rain, in the rain,
With the bumblebees a-bumbling and the tumblebugs a-tumbling—
How I wish I had my gaiters off and was a boy again!"

He was just about to begin another verse, when he discovered the burgomaster and the other two men sit-

ting in front of the inn. As soon as he saw them he stopped his singing and came over toward them.

"Move along, Pretzel," said the burgomaster; "move along. We are holding a secret council here. That was a very nice song you were chirping, but it has nothing to do with what we are talking about. So go on about your business."

Pretzel did not pay any attention to him, but came right along and seated himself on the bench alongside the burgomaster. He did it very quietly and without any fuss. Nobody had ever seen him in a hurry and he was never known to get excited. He placed his bell carefully on the ground, and then folding his hands on his lap he opened his mouth and said in a most solemn manner, "Hoity-toity; land o' barley. Tell me the news, good burgomaster."

The burgomaster frowned and fidgeted with his cane. "Not now, Pretzel," he said; "not now. We are not yet ready to have it made public. So go on about your business."

"But it is my business to know the news," responded

Pretzel, as he slowly twirled his thumbs and looked up at the sky. "If I am to go on about my business I must know the news. If I don't know the news I can't go on about my business."

"That sounds like good reasoning," said the burgomaster. "What do you think about it, Bumble?"

"I don't know but what he 's right," answered the constable. "As the village crier he ought to know the news, provided he keeps it to himself. Ain't that so, Pappy?"

The burgomaster did not wait to hear what Pappy thought about it, but turned and spoke to Pretzel again: "You are a wise man, Pretzel. You are smarter than you look, and I have a good mind to confide in you and tell you the news, along with the constable and the postmaster here. And by the way, Pretzel, it is the most astounding news that has ever come to this village or to any other village. In fact, it is more than astounding: It is—it is—"

"Perhaps you mean '*re*sounding,'" suggested Pretzel.

"Not at all!" snapped the burgomaster. "Don't

try to use such big words. Leave that to me. But, as I was about to say, it is the most prodigious news you have ever heard. You hear what I say, Pretzel?—prodigious! You think, perhaps, I am excited about it. Crackers and cucumbers! if you could know the news I am holding here in my head all by myself, you would wonder that I keep as calm as I do. Any other man as old and as stout as I am would have a fit! And do any of you see me having a fit? Of course you don't! I am the burgomaster!"

"That reminds me," said Pretzel, "of a little ditty I made up the other day:

"There was once an old donkey named Fritz,
And he got the most awfulest fits.
So they caught him one day
And they stuffed him with hay,
Till he—"

"That will do," said the burgomaster interrupting him. "This is no time for Mother Goose performances. We are discussing a most serious matter.

When this news gets out there is going to be the biggest commotion that has ever happened in Olenberg. I tell you, Pretzel, this is news as is news! No ordinary, everyday gossip; the kind that you go hollering around the town. No siree! This is the sort that it takes the burgomaster to handle; and it will have to be managed with great care; with great care, let me tell you. It would never do to let it break loose all by itself. It must be given out in a special manner and with proper ceremony. Nobody must get the least hint of it until the time comes to announce it, which I am going to do in a speech; a grand speech. And if I tell it to you now, Pretzel, along with Bumble and Pappy Grimm here, can I depend upon you to keep it a secret and not breathe a word to anybody?"

Pretzel looked very grave, and said: "You make me smile."

"Very well, then," continued the burgomaster, "I feel that I can trust you; and you, too, Bumble and Pappy Grimm. And I am very glad of it, for there should be no secrets among village officials in matters

of official business; and this surely is the most important sort of official business; the most important; and I need your advice in deciding how to manage it."

"And by the way," said Pretzel, interrupting him, "I don't believe I finished that ditty I was reciting for you—

"So they caught him one day
And they stuffed him with hay—"

But the burgomaster went right on, without giving him a chance to finish it: "I tell you, my friends, this is a great matter; a great matter! But where shall we talk it over? We are too public out here. Someone may overhear us."

"To be sure," declared Pappy Grimm. "You are quite right. This is not the place for a secret council. Let us sit at the table there, beyond the gooseberry bushes, in the side yard."

"That is just the place," agreed the burgomaster; "just the place; cool and quiet and safe from busy-

bodies," and getting up he led the way into the side yard, where he and the other three disappeared behind the gooseberry bushe and sat down together at a small table under a wide-spreading maple tree.

CHAPTER III

A GREAT SECRET

The four village officials did not get away any too soon, for scarcely had they gone into the garden when three mischievous girls came tiptoeing slowly and very carefully around the corner of the inn, intending to hide behind the lilac bush that was near the front door, in hopes of hearing what the burgomaster was saying. Two of them were dairymaids, dressed in their pretty holiday frocks and with their long flaxen braids tied with little red satin bows. The third one, who was the oldest and the tallest and the prettiest, with mischievous brown eyes and the blackest of black hair, was Hulda, the miller's daughter.

Hulda was always called the miller's daughter, but as a matter of fact she was really an orphan, and good Miller Dinkel and his wife (who had no children of their own) were only her foster parents. They had taken her when she was a mere baby, so that she had

never known any other father and mother; and the village folks often wondered whether Dinkel and his wife did not sometimes wish they had not been in such a hurry to adopt her; for, to tell the truth, Hulda was a very wilful girl and gave her kind old foster parents

many a heartache with ner temper and her naughty pranks. Indeed, she gave them more trouble than all her foster sisters and brothers put together; for you must know that the Dinkels had brought up several boys and girls. Like all the good married couples of

the village they were very fond of children, and you would be surprised to know how many little orphans had been brought to Olenberg from far-away towns and cities, to be taken care of by one family or another among the good, kind-hearted people of this little village.

When Hulda and her companions discovered that the burgomaster had gone they were greatly surprised and disappointed and stamped their feet with vexation. "Oh, well, what do we care!" said Hulda, tossing her head. "We 'll find some way of learning the news, in spite of the old burgomaster. It is n't fair for him to be telling it to old Pappy Grimm and Constable Bumble and not let us know, too!"

"No, of course it is n't!" cried the two dairymaids. "It 's a shame! We have as much right to know the news as anybody! Oh, I do so wonder what it is! I 'm just dying to know!"

"So am I," said Hulda; "and I mean to find it out before I go home. But come along; it won't do us any good to stand moping around here. Hello! there 's

Gretchen. Perhaps she 's heard something," and she pointed to a girl of about her own age who was coming across the square toward the inn.

Like Hulda, Gretchen was also an orphan; and this was perhaps the only thing in which the two girls were alike. Gretchen was tall and fair, with soft blue eyes and wavy golden hair, and had the kind and graceful ways of a gentle nature. She was a great favorite in the village because of her sweet disposition—always bright and cheery and ready to do for others. Although she was only the foster daughter of Daddy Rosengarten, the weaver, she loved him as much as though he were her own father, and he loved her every bit as much as he did his own children. Indeed, some of the village folks thought he loved her more, and they did not blame him for it, either; for there was not a family in the village but would have liked to have had her for a daughter. When Mother Rosengarten died, some three years before, all the household duties of the little family had fallen upon Gretchen, and no own daughter could have taken up the work with greater love or

willingness. She took care of Mary and Dicky and baby Rosalie like a little mother, and Daddy Rosengarten never tired of telling his neighbors that he did not believe there ever was another such girl.

"Hi-o there, Gretchen!" called out Hulda. "Have you heard anything of the news?"

"No, I have not," replied Gretchen; "and I do not suppose anybody will until the good burgomaster is ready to tell us."

"Oh, I 'm not so sure about that," said Hulda, in a somewhat scornful tone. "At any rate, *I* don't intend to wait until he gets ready to tell us. I mean to find it out in some way; and where there 's a will there 's a way. It is n't fair for him to keep it like this. It 's a shame! It is n't right!" and she stamped her foot again and scowled, and each of the dairymaids did the same thing.

Gretchen only smiled and started to walk on. "You must not be so impatient, Hulda," she said good-naturedly. "We will all hear the news in good time."

"Pouf!" exclaimed Hulda, tossing her head; "you

have n't a bit of curiosity, Gretchen. I would n't be like you for anything!" and then turning to her two companions she said, "Come on, girls, let 's go down to Sammy Umpeldump's and get some apples."

Putting their arms around one another's waists, with Hulda in the middle, the three girls started off, skipping along merrily, and singing as they went:

"O'er the bridge across the water
Comes the miller's pretty daughter,
Lightly tripping, gaily skipping o'er the hurly-burly stream,
Where the morning sun is sipping
And the shadows gently dipping,
As she hums a little ditty like the murmur of a dream.

How her merry blue eyes twinkle
At the sprinkle and the tinkle
Of the tantalizing water 'neath her dancing toe and heel!
How she loves to see it rushing
With its bubbling and its gushing,
All a-rumbling and a-tumbling o'er the grumbling water wheel."

Suddenly Hulda stopped. "Hush!" she exclaimed in a whisper, holding up a finger. "I hear someone talking!"

The three girls had got around to the other side of the inn garden, and now as they stopped to listen they looked over the fence, and there, sure enough, they saw the burgomaster and the town crier with the constable and the postmaster sitting about the table under the maple tree. The burgomaster was talking and the other three were leaning away over the table listening to him, so that their heads almost bumped together.

The girls crept up close to the fence and strained their ears to listen, but the burgomaster spoke so low they could not make out a word he was saying. From the expression on the face of Constable Bumble and of Pappy Grimm they knew he must be telling them something wonderful, and when at last he finished they saw the three listeners sit back in their chairs and stare at one another as though they were all too much surprised to speak.

Pappy Grimm was the first to say anything.

"Whee-hew!" he exclaimed. "Upon my word, this is simply wonderful, *wonderful!*" and he rubbed his hands together and rolled up his eyes.

"Yes," spoke up Constable Bumble; "you are right, Pappy: It is wonderful! It is more than wonderful! I never expect to live to hear such news again. And what will the people say? Aye, yi, yi! what will the people say?"

Pretzel had taken off his hat, and putting it on the table was about to make a remark, when the burgomaster spoke:

"Now that I have told you the news," he said, looking from one to the other, "I must have your solemn promise not to speak of it to anyone. As I said to you a little while ago, we will call a meeting, this evening, a big mass meeting in the town hall, and I will make a speech, a grand speech, and announce the great news to all the town at once. And until then not a word of it must get out; not a word. It must remain a secret, a dead secret, and I know I can trust each one of you to keep it. Is it not so?"

Each of the three brought his hand down on the table and said it was so, and each of them solemnly promised he would not say a word to a living soul, no matter what happened. In fact, Constable Bumble declared he would eat his hat if he let drop so much as a hint; and Pretzel said he would sooner go without cheese pie than betray such a secret; which was a great deal for Pretzel to say, for there was nothing in the world he liked half so well as cheese pie. Pappy Grimm was also about to say something of the same kind, when old Mammy Grimm came bustling out of the back door of the inn and going straight up to where he sat took hold of him by the ear.

"What do you mean by sitting around out here!" she scolded. "Don't you know it 's time to get the mail ready? Come into the house this minute!" and she gave her old husband's ear such a pull that he jumped up from his chair with a squeal.

"You will have to excuse me, my friends," he said, as Mammy Grimm pulled him away from the table; "but you see how it is."

"Tut, tut," said Pretzel; "we see how it is: Your wife is no gentleman."

"Mind your own business," snapped Mammy Grimm, scowling at Pretzel, as she and the postmaster started off across the garden. "And as for you," she said, speaking to Pappy and still holding him by the ear, "what were you and those men talking about?"

"It was a private matter," answered Pappy, very meekly. "I cannot tell you anything about it just now. It is a secret."

"A secret!" exclaimed his wife. "You come right into the house, this minute, and tell it to me at once. You don't have any secrets from me!"

"But don't you understand — don't you see—" he stammered, trying to explain and trying to get away; but his crosspatch wife

marched him straight up the back steps and hustled him into the house, without listening to any excuses or explanations. And Hulda and the two dairymaids who were still hiding outside the fence, watching and listening to everything that went on, felt certain that she would make poor Pappy Grimm tell her the news, in spite of his promise to the burgomaster.

And sure enough, the very next minute they heard her voice from the open window in the kitchen, saying —"Of course I can keep a secret; so tell it to me at once!" and a moment or two later they heard her call out: "Mercy on us, you don't mean it! Right here in this village! My, but this *is* news! I am all of a flutter! I never suspected anything like that!" And then, just as they hoped they were about to hear something more, Pappy Grimm pulled the window down with a bang.

Meanwhile the burgomaster had remained at the table with Pretzel and the constable, and they were so busy talking together, discussing plans for the big meeting, that they did not hear what was going on any-

where else. At last they seemed to have everything settled, and the burgomaster pushed back his chair and made ready to get up. "So, everything is now arranged," he said; "and be sure, Pretzel, that you go on every street in the village in announcing the meeting, and see that everybody is told about it. We want everybody to come. Don't make any mistakes, for you know, Pretzel, you do get twisted sometimes. Sing it out in plain language and a clear voice. And say it in prose; don't be trying to make poetry out of it."

"Never worry," said Pretzel. "I will announce it so sweetly and so plainly, that even the cats and dogs will want to come. Hark now, I will do it so:" saying which he slowly got up, and after swinging his bell back and forth two or three times, he began in a loud, singsong voice: "Listen to me, good people; listen to me: A grand meeting in the town hall this evening, at half past seven by the clock, to hear the news. Grand oration by the burgomaster. Come one, come all, and hear the wonderful news; come hear the wonderful news."

"That 's all right, Pretzel," declared the burgomaster; "that 's all right. It could n't be better. Say it just that way; don't try to improve upon it."

Pretzel made a stiff bow and putting on his hat was about to walk away, when he suddenly stopped and looked at the burgomaster. "By the way," he said, "I don't believe I ever finished that little ditty I started to recite for you—

> *"So they caught him one day*
> *And they stuffed him with hay,*
> *Till he—"*

"Go on about your business," commanded the burgomaster. "This is no time to be telling stories about sick donkeys!" And seeing that the burgomaster was not going to listen to him, Pretzel turned round again and walked out of the garden, ringing his bell as he went.

As soon as he got outside, he started across the square, calling out at the top of his voice: "Listen to me, good people; listen to me: Great news; great

news. Monster mass meeting at the town hall to-night at half after seven by the clock. Speech by the burgomaster; and perhaps a song by me—perhaps; perhaps. Come one, come all, both great and small. Don't get the blues; come hear the news. No time to snooze; put on your shoes. Great news, great news, for all of you's."

He was so absorbed in making up rhymes, that he scarcely noticed where he was going, and the first thing he knew, as he turned into the main street, he almost bumped into an old maid who was hurrying along with a basket and several bundles.

"Excuse me, Louisa," he said, "excuse me. Come to the meeting to-night, Louisa. The burgomaster is going to announce the news. Tell your friends; tell everybody. And come early,

"For let me say, and say it firm,
The early birdie gets the worm."

He was about to pass on, but Louisa stood in his way. "Don't be in such a hurry," she said. "Stop a moment and tell me the news, Pretzel."

"Tut, tut," answered Pretzel. "If you want to hear the news, come to the meeting. It is not for me to tell you now. It is a secret. I never tell secrets. Remember, I am a Pretzel."

"But I can't go to the meeting," said Louisa. "You know very well I can't leave my old Aunty Ann alone at night; and whatever am I going to do? It will break my heart if everybody hears the news before I do. I just can't stand it!" and as she said this the tears came into her eyes and she looked so disappointed and made such a sorry face, that Pretzel turned away his head.

"I am sorry for you, Louisa," he said; "but remember it is not my fault that you have a wheezy old aunt who 's afraid of the night air. So, don't detain me. I must be going."

But Louisa still stood in his way. "Ah, please Pretzel," she begged. "We are old friends, and I think you might. Come, now; be nice once. Remember, I am an old maid and an orphan. I have never had anybody to love me; and yet I love everybody and

would do anything for anybody. See what I have here in my basket—a cheese pie. I was taking it home for my supper; but you shall have it, Pretzel. I love cheese pie, but I know you do, too; and so I am going to give you this. You *will* tell me the news, won't you, Pretzel?"

Louisa uncovered the basket as she spoke, and there lay the most delicious looking cheese pie. Pretzel looked at it and stroked his chin. "Did I understand you to say, Louisa, that you are an old maid and that you won't be able to come to the meeting this evening?

Hoity-toity, I must think that over. And meanwhile, Louisa, let me have a closer look at that cheese pie."

Louisa took out the pie and handed it to him. It was beautifully baked, and smelled as sweet and fresh as though it had just come from the oven. Pretzel weighed it up and down in his hand and smacked his lips. "Louisa," he said, "I really believe I ought to tell you the news. Yes, I do. If it was anybody else I would not think of it for a moment. But as you have no father or mother and nobody is likely ever to want to marry you, and as you can't get away from your old aunty to-night—why, it seems to me it is my duty to let you know the news. Yes, Louisa, I feel it is my duty,

"And here 's a man who does his duty,
In spite of freckles or of beauty."

"Then you *will* tell it to me, won't you, Pretzel!" cried Louisa, her face all aglow with joy and expectation.

"No," replied Pretzel, very solemnly; "I have promised not to tell it to anybody. But I will write

it for you;" and so saying, he placed the pie and his bell on a doorstep, and then taking a pad and pencil from his pocket he slowly wrote out the secret, while Louisa stood first on one foot and then on the other, scarcely able to wait till he got through.

When he had finished he slowly tore the sheet from the pad and handed it to her. "There," he said; "now you have it. And remember, it is for you only. Tear it up as soon as you have read it, and don't whisper a word of it to man or woman." And taking a bite of his pie he walked off down the street, ringing his bell as he went and calling out as best he could with his mouth full of cheese custard, "Listen to me, good people; listen to me."

CHAPTER IV

HINTS AND WHISPERS

No sooner had Louisa read what was written on the paper, than she gave a little scream. "Oh, dear me!" she cried, "this quite takes my breath away;" and she plumped herself and her basket and bundles down on the doorstep and read the news all over again.

She had hardly finished when she heard someone coming along in a great hurry. Looking up she saw old Mammy Grimm walking across the square as fast as her short legs could carry her. She was usually very neat when she was out on the street, but now she was wearing her old kitchen apron, and her sleeves were rolled up, and her sunbonnet was hanging around her neck. When she spied Louisa sitting on the doorstep she came hurrying over to her, calling out in an excited whisper as she came: "O Louisa, whatever do you think! I 've got something perfectly wonderful to

tell you. But you must n't breathe a word of it. It 's the greatest kind of a secret!"

"And, Oh, I 've got something to tell *you*!" cried Louisa. "The most amazing news you ever heard! I have promised not to tell; but I know you won't breathe a word of it to anyone."

"It is n't about the nobleman who was here this afternoon, is it?" asked Mammy Grimm, panting hard and wiping her face with her apron.

"Yes," answered Louisa, "that 's just what it is. And do you know it, too?"

"Indeed I do!" panted Mammy Grimm; "and is n't it perfectly astonishing? Why, I 'm all in a flutter

about it! I have promised not to tell anyone, but I simply must go and tell it to Sister Doppel. She 's my best friend, and I never keep anything from her. But how did *you* find it out, Louisa?"

"Never you mind," replied Louisa. "It was told to me in confidence, and I am not going to say a word to anybody—Oh, dear me! there goes Matilda Feesel. She 's my dearest friend, and I must tell her. I never keep anything from Matilda!" And gathering up her things as she spoke she went hurrying after Matilda, who had disappeared around the corner of the inn; while old Mammy Grimm continued on her way toward Sister Doppel's, panting and puffing with excitement.

Louisa was in such a hurry to catch up with her friend, that she had not taken time to properly arrange her bundles; and she had not gone more than twenty feet before she dropped one of them, and while she stooped to pick that up another one tumbled down; and scarcely had she got them both up in her arms again, when the third one started to fall, and as she

grabbed for it she let go of her basket and down *it* went, tipping over on the grass and spilling out a loaf of bread and some potatoes and a jar of pickles. "Oh, dear me!" she cried; and then down went all her bundles together, and the next moment poor Louisa herself fell down.

She was so flustered and nervous by this time that she was ready to cry as she picked herself up; and she probably would have cried if Constable Bumble had not just then come along and helped her gather up her things.

"Well, well," he said, as he fetched back the jar of pickles which had rolled under a bench; "you seem to be trying to spread a picnic around here. That 's what comes of being in too big a hurry, Louisa. You know what the Good Book says: 'The more haste the less speed.' When you 've got so much to carry, don't be in such an awful rush."

But Louisa did not pay any attention to this advice. As soon as she got her basket and her bundles again she

set off as fast as ever, hardly taking time to thank the constable for his kind assistance.

"I wonder what 's the matter with her," he thought, as he stood and looked after her. "She acts as though she had something on her mind."

He was just about to turn and walk on, when Hulda came running up to him. "Aha!" she cried, shaking her finger at him. "I caught you; and I am going to tell the burgomaster."

"What do you mean?" he demanded very sternly.

"You have been telling Louisa the news," declared Hulda, still shaking her finger. "I saw you! And if I tell the burgomaster he won't let you be constable any more."

"But I was n't telling Louisa the news!" retorted the constable, getting very red in the face; "and you know very well I was n't, you good-for-nothing mischief-maker! You have no right to say such a thing to me. I would not betray a secret to anybody—least of all to her."

"But I am going to tell the burgomaster, anyhow," said Hulda.

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"But it is n't true!" roared the constable.

"But he will think it is if I tell him," responded Hulda. "So there, now!"

"But you would n't dare to do such a thing," said Bumble, beginning to look frightened.

"Oh, yes I would," declared Hulda; "and I 'm going to, too; unless—unless—"

"Unless what?" asked the constable.

"Unless you tell *me* the news," replied Hulda.

"But I can't," said Bumble. "I have no right to. And I won't!"

"All right," answered Hulda, tossing her head; "suit yourself. You know what the burgomaster will do to you if I tell him that I caught you giving away the secret to Louisa."

"But it will be just as bad if I tell you," said the constable, looking dreadfully worried.

"Oh, not at all," responded the crafty Hulda. "If you tell it to me the burgomaster will never know anything about it. I promise you that."

Constable Bumble looked carefully around in every

direction. "You promise me, Hulda, that if I tell you the news you will not say a word to anybody and that you won't tell the burgomaster that story about Louisa?"

Hulda nodded her head. "It 's a bargain," she said, putting a very serious tone into her voice.

Bumble looked around once more. There was no one in sight. Leaning over close to Hulda's ear, and speaking in a whisper, he said: "Remember, not a word to anybody. Well, the nobleman who was here this afternoon was Baron von Dunderkrout, secretary and messenger extraordinary to His Imperial Highness the Exalted Prince of Burgeldorf; and he came to tell the burgomaster that—"

Before he could say another word a frightened voice called out, "O Constable Bumble, come quick! come quick! There 's a dreadful dog fight over there in the alley!" and golden-haired Gretchen came running across the square, her cheeks red with excitement and her pretty little mouth all of a tremble. "Oh, do hurry," she cried; "I am so afraid they will hurt one another!"

Constable Bumble was glad of an excuse to get away from Hulda, and without waiting a moment he seized his stick and went scurrying over to where Gretchen was pointing and from which direction could now be heard the most frightful snarling and barking and ki-yi-ing. "I 'll settle them!" he shouted, as he went along; "I 'll settle them! and I have a good mind to arrest somebody!"

Gretchen stopped to get her breath and to replace her dainty blue sunbonnet which had blown off as she ran. She looked a pretty picture, with the roses in her cheeks and her golden hair tumbled about in ringlets over her pearly-pink ears. But Hulda was too vexed to notice how she looked. Instead of returning Gretchen's smile she scowled at her and stamped her foot. "What do you mean," she demanded, "by interrupting the constable when he was talking to me?"

"I am very sorry," answered Gretchen; "but I did not suppose it was anything important."

"Important!" exclaimed Hulda. "It was a thou-

sand times more important than an old dog fight! He was just about to tell me the news."

"Oh!" cried Gretchen, looking very much astonished, "I thought that was a secret and that nobody was to know anything about it until to-night."

"So it is a secret," said Hulda, "and the constable was going to tell it only to me; and now you have gone and spoiled it all!"

"But the constable had no right to tell it to you, and you had no right to listen to it," replied Gretchen, speaking very seriously.

"Oh, of course everybody knows you would n't do such a thing," said Hulda, with a sneer; "and I suppose like a good little girl you are going to wait until this evening. But let me tell you, *I* don't intend to wait that long if I can help it. No indeed!" and Hulda tossed her head and looked exceedingly scornful.

"You may do as you please," responded Gretchen. "As for me, I don't expect to hear the news until after the meeting to-night, as I am going to stay home with Dicky and Rosalie so that Daddy and Mary may go."

"Oh, well, you have no curiosity," returned Hulda. "It 's easy enough for you to be good. I don't suppose you care if you never hear the news."

"Indeed I do," answered Gretchen. "I am as anxious as anybody to hear it; but that is no reason why I should n't have patience;" and without another word she turned around and walked off, leaving Hulda gazing after her with a scornful smile.

But in another moment Hulda's attention was drawn in a different direction. Sitting on a bench under a shady chestnut tree on the other side of the square, she discovered Aunt Angelica; and coming toward her was the burgomaster.

Aunt Angelica was a very stately woman, who always wore a black silk dress with a white ruffle around the neck and a little lace cap on the top of her head. And it was because she was so stately that everybody called her Aunt—that is, everybody except the burgomaster. He called her plain Angelica; and the only reason he did this was because he was going to marry her. In fact, the wedding was now scarcely more than

a month off, and everyone was looking forward to it with great interest, for no wedding in the village had ever been quite so grand as this was planned to be. But although the people had great respect for Aunt Angelica, everybody was half afraid of her. Even the burgomaster himself did not always seem to be at his ease with her. She could be very haughty and severe, and the burgomaster was always afraid he might do something or say something that would offend her, and then perhaps she would not marry him. This would have been a great disappointment to him, for he thought a great deal of his Angelica and was exceedingly proud of her. Her father had been a major in the army and one of her uncles had once spoken to the King of Tomania; besides which she could do the most beautiful embroidery and could make the best apple butter of any woman in the village.

On summer afternoons, after the sun got low, she often sat out in the square under the big chestnut tree, to work on her embroidery until it was time to go to supper. And she had now just settled herself down

for a quiet half hour by herself when Hulda happened to see her. Ordinarily, Hulda would not have bothered to go near her, for she did not like the stately old lady; but when she saw the burgomaster approaching the

bench she thought to herself, "Aha, perhaps now I can hear the news, for he surely will tell it to Aunt Angelica." And no sooner had she thought this than she went tiptoeing across the grass, and, stealing up behind the chestnut tree, crouched down close to the back of the bench, to listen.

She had hardly done this when the burgomaster came up, and taking off his hat and making one of his magnificent bows, he said in his most gracious voice: "Good afternoon, my dear Angelica. I hope I find you well;" and without waiting for an invitation he seated himself on the bench.

Aunt Angelica went right on with her work, looking very prim and stately, and instead of saying, "How do you do?" she said, "What is this remarkable news everybody is talking about?"

The burgomaster coughed and looked uneasy. "I am going to announce the news at a meeting in the town hall this evening," he answered, smiling very sweetly and beaming on Aunt Angelica through his spectacles. "You must be sure to come, Angelica. You must be sure to come."

"I will come if I feel like it," she said. "But you have not answered my question: What is the news?"

"Oh, but my lovey dove," said the burgomaster, getting red in the face; "it is a secret. I must not tell it

to anybody before half past seven this evening—not even to you, my chocolate drop."

"I wish you would not call me a chocolate drop," she replied, speaking very firmly, and still going calmly on with her work. "I am not a chocolate drop. And do you mean to tell me that you have a secret you are going to keep from me?"

The burgomaster looked more uncomfortable than ever. "But don't you understand," he said; "don't you see how it is, my peach preserve? I am not keeping it from you. You are going to hear it this evening—in a couple of hours; only a couple of hours. The time will pass very quickly; I know it will. And you shall hear the news then; every bit of it. Indeed you shall, my pansy; my Johnny-jump-up."

"But I tell you I wish to hear it now," she commanded. "I do not intend to wait a couple of hours; or one hour. No, I do not intend to wait at all. You will tell me the news this minute, or I shall be offended."

"No, no, my rose geranium, don't say that!" cried

the burgomaster in great alarm. "Don't be offended!"

"But I shall be," replied Aunt Angelica, in her most stately manner. "And, what is more, I wish you would not call me a rose geranium."

"Of course, if you are really going to be offended," went on the burgomaster, beginning to puff with excitement, "why, of course, I shall have to tell you. There is no other way out of it; no other way, my rosy apple. Only you will have to promise me not to breathe a word of it to anybody."

She was about to promise him, when Pretzel came up the street and turned into the square, followed by a crowd of boys and girls all laughing and shouting at once and joining with him in the song he was singing:

"Ah, there 's nothing like cheese pie to drive out the blues;
(Come around to the meeting and hear the great news)
It 's better than syrup or tonic or plaster;
(Come hear the great speech by the great burgomaster!)
If you 're hungry or sad or rheumatic or dirty,
(Be sure that you get there before seven-thirty)
Or if you are bilious or have a sore eye,
There 's nothing so good as a piece of cheese pie!"

"Pots and kettles!" exclaimed the burgomaster, getting up; "we can't be telling secrets with the square full of people. Come, my fair Angelica, my frosted honey cake, let me see you home; and as we walk along I will whisper the news in your waxy ear."

CHAPTER V

THE NEWS BREAKS OUT

Pretzel stopped to rest in the square. He had been half way round the village and had rung his bell so hard and sung so loud, that he was quite exhausted. So he seated himself on a bench, to freshen up a bit before going on. Yet it hardly seemed necessary for him to go any farther, for everybody appeared to have heard about the meeting by this time, and it really looked as though more than half the people of the village had come back to the square with him.

Hulda had come out from behind the chestnut tree, feeling decidedly vexed and disappointed, and went over to where the young folks were gathered about Pretzel. They were all talking at once. Some of them were begging Pretzel to tell them the news; others were guessing at what it was, and still others were saying it was a shame to keep them waiting like this, even though it was now only a little over an hour

and a half before the time set for the meeting; while off on one side a group of women were jabbering in excited whispers, with their fingers to their lips and acting altogether as though they were discussing some tremendous secret. Nor is it hard to guess what it was;

for if Louisa and Mammy Grimm had each a special friend to whom they told the news, it is easy to imagine that each of these special friends also had a special friend who must be let into the secret. It is no wonder, therefore, that there were such mysterious whisperings and excited exclamations, and such a nodding of

heads, and altogether such goings-on, that the other villagers could not think what it meant, unless it might be that a surprise party was being planned for somebody's birthday.

"Have you found out yet what the news is?" cried the two dairymaids, as Hulda came up.

"Tut, tut," said Pretzel, who overheard them. "Nobody knows the news yet—nobody but me."

"Don't be so sure about that," called back a big, rosy-faced young woman. It was Matilda Feesel, and she turned up her nose at Pretzel and gave him a very sarcastic smile. "I guess I know as much about the news as you do."

Pretzel shook his finger at her in his slow, deliberate way, and said:

"*Matilda Foose,*
You are a goose."

"Hold your tongue!" she called back at him. "My name is not 'Foose!' "

"Well, that may be," replied Pretzel; "but some-

times we must change a name for the sake of grammar. However, if you prefer it so, I will say—

"Matilda Feesel,
You are a geesle."

"You are a nasty old man!" snapped Matilda, making a face at him; "and I tell you I do know the news. So, there now!"

"And so do I," called out somebody else. "And me, too," said another. "And me," "and me," cried out one after another.

"But I 'd like to know who knew it before I did!" exclaimed old Mammy Grimm, bustling into the crowd. "I knew it first."

"No you did n't, either!" called out Louisa. "I knew it first—did n't I, Pretzel?"

Before anybody could answer anybody else, all the villagers began calling out, "Treason! treason! Who has been telling the news?" And altogether there was such a hubbub and confusion, that Constable Bumble came hurrying out of the inn.

"Hold your tongues!" he commanded. "First thing you know, I 'll arrest somebody! What 's going on here, anyhow?"

"Some of these women think they know something," explained Pretzel; "but they don't know what I know."

"No; nor what I know, either," said Bumble, looking very wise and fierce at the same time. "So stop your jabbering and don't talk so much! You don't any of you know what Pretzel and I know."

"It is the truth," said Pretzel; and getting up he folded his arms across his chest and began to sing:

"There 's no one knows what Bumble knows, excepting only me;
And no one knows how like a clam both I and Bumble be.
So waddle homeward, sister; waddle home.

There 's none can know what we both know, no matter what nor how;
For, as you see, both he and me are mum as mummies now.
So waddle homeward, sister; waddle home."

He would have sung some more, but Mammy Grimm and Matilda Feesel and a dozen others burst out laughing; and pointing their fingers at him they shouted, "Ha, ha, but we do know! we do know! You are not the only one who knows the news!" And then they all joined together and began to sing just as he did:

"There 's no one knows what Bumble knows, excepting only me;
And you don't know how like a goose both you and Bumble be.
So stop your talking, Pretzel; stop your talk.

For we do know what you both know—it makes no difference how,—
And anyone 's a dummy who would be a mummy now.
So stop your talking, Pretzel; stop your talk."

At this moment the burgomaster came puffing upon the scene. "Noodles and poodles!" he exclaimed; "what 's this I hear! Who has heard the news? Who has dared to hear the news?" and he glared about him

so savagely that all the little boys who were there got down on the ground and crawled under the benches. "Answer me!" he went on—"Who has heard the news? Have you heard it, Matilda Feesel?"

"Yes, dear burgomaster," answered Matilda, dropping a curtsy; "I have heard it."

"Who told it to you?" he demanded, shaking his cane in the air.

"A little bird told it to me," answered Matilda.

"A little bird!" roared the burgomaster. "Boots and bumbershoots! and what is the little bird's name?"

There is no telling what she was going to reply, for just then there was a stir in the crowd that took the burgomaster's attention. The people were making way for Aunt Angelica, who came walking along in her usual stately manner, which had the effect of making everybody stop talking.

She walked straight up to the burgomaster, and tapping him on the shoulder with her fan, she said in a cool voice: "Don't get so excited. Remember, if you please, that a little bird also told *me* the news."

"What—what 's that!" stammered the burgomaster, his fat cheeks swelling out and getting very rosy. "Did n't you promise me you would n't say anything about it?"

"Yes," she said, somewhat sternly; "but I was led to believe that it was being told to me only. You have deceived me; for, so far as I can see, it appears to be breaking out all over town."

"But it has no right to be," declared the burgomaster, thumping his cane angrily on the ground. "Gas and molasses! it has no right to be."

"Oh, yes it has," replied Aunt Angelica. "This sort of news is like the measles; it ought to come out. It is all nonsense to try to keep it in until a certain time."

At this little speech there was a great clapping of hands, and two brave men in the background called out "Hurrah for Aunt Angelica!"

"And now that nearly everybody in the village is here," she went on, quite calmly, "it is my advice to you that you announce the news right now, and be done with it."

The burgomaster puffed and sputtered and hemmed and hawed. He wanted to be angry and he wanted to tell Aunt Angelica to mind her own business and go home, but he was afraid he might offend her. So he merely made a good deal of noise under his breath and swelled up and did the best he could to let her know in a polite way that he did not intend to follow her advice.

"Why, my dear Angelica," he said, "don't you see for yourself it is altogether out of the question? It would never do in the world to give out the news now, and in this plain and common fashion. And how about the meeting? What are we going to do at the meeting if the news is told now? And how about my speech? I have not made up my speech yet; and I could not think of announcing great news like this without a speech. Why, I just could n't think of it; I could n't think of it!"

"Then *I* will announce the news," declared Aunt Angelica. And before the burgomaster knew just what was happening, Aunt Angelica turned around toward

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the people in her stately way and calmly told them the news:

"About one o'clock this afternoon," she began, speaking very deliberately and distinctly, "the Baron von Dunderkrout came to inform the burgomaster that one of the foster girls of this village is a princess. This has never before been known to anyone. She was taken away from her uncle's home when a little child. It was given out by her relatives that she had died; but instead of that she was brought to this village like any ordinary orphan, without anything to show who she really was or where she came from, and left with one of the families here to be brought up as one of the village girls. This has only now been discovered for the first time; but it is not known when it happened, nor who brought her here, nor which one of the families adopted her. All that anybody knows, is, that such a thing did happen some fifteen or twenty years ago; and that is all. But now the Exalted Prince of Burgeldorf has ordered that this maiden of royal blood must be found, so that he can marry her at once. He

will not marry anyone but a princess, and he has already been several years trying to find one. He is therefore now in great haste and will be here next Saturday morning to claim his bride and escort her in a golden coach to his palace beyond the mountains. So there, good people, you have the news."

It was all so sudden, so startling, so overwhelming, that for a moment or two everybody stood perfectly still and nobody said a word. The people could hardly realize at first what it meant. It almost took their breath away, to think that one of the village girls was a princess, a real, live princess, and that she was going to marry a prince and live in a palace. No wonder the burgomaster had said it was astounding news. It sounded like a fairy tale. It did not seem real. They could not at once convince themselves that it was true; and so they stood staring at one another and wondering what to do.

But in another minute they found their tongues and all began to chatter at once at the top of their voices. Many of them shook hands with one another and made

all kinds of exclamations and excited noises, to show how surprised and astonished they were. Two men tossed their hats into the air with a loud shout, and then fell over a bench, breaking the back off, in trying to catch their hats as they came down. Some of the

children ran about screaming and clapping their hands, and others got spanked for talking too much. The dogs barked, the old men blew their noses, and Pretzel rang his bell; while those who had heard the news before scurried about here and there, calling out: "I knew it! I knew it!" and it was not long before there

was again such a commotion that Constable Bumble felt it necessary to call for silence, especially as the burgomaster was making signs that he wanted to speak.

"Thumpity-humpity, crash and explosions!" roared the burgomaster, as soon as he could be heard. "What's the meaning of all this uproar? Be calm! Settle down; settle down!" and he whacked his cane on a bench until it seemed as though it would surely break. "And furthermore," he went on, looking very much disgusted and casting the blackest kind of a look at Aunt Angelica, "now that the cat is out of the bag and you all know the news, there won't be any meeting to-night. You hear that, Pretzel?—there won't be any meeting to-night!"

"Aye, aye," answered Pretzel:

"The meeting 's off, the news is out;
Good-bye to Baron Sauerkraut!"

"But, dear burgomaster," called out Matilda Feesel, "you have n't told us who the princess is. There are a

dozen or more of us foster girls in the village. Which one of us is the princess?"

"Blotters and bottles!" snapped the burgomaster; "how do I know?"

"Then how is anybody to know?" cried out several voices at once. "How are we going to tell who is the princess?" And everyone began to look at everyone else, with the most puzzled and disappointed expressions.

"Hoity-toity," said Pretzel, "does n't some one of you girls *feel* like a princess?

> "*Why, land o' barley, don't you know,*
> *That, though my name was Jones,*
> *If I was ever a princess once*
> *I 'd feel it in my bones.*"

Matilda Feesel turned up her nose at him again. "And how do you know, Pretzel, that I don't feel it in my bones?" she asked, giving him a most haughty look and holding her head very high.

"Pooh! you 're not the only one," exclaimed one of

the dairymaids. "I have always felt that I was something better than a mere peasant girl!" and she, too, held herself up with a lofty air.

"Go along with you!" sneered Louisa. "Look at your big, red hands and your clumsy feet. You are no princess! A maiden of royal blood would have dainty hands and small, graceful feet, like—like mine." And, indeed, Louisa did have very pretty hands and feet.

Hulda gave a scornful laugh and tossed her head. "Pouf!" she said, "the prince is not going to marry an old maid. And besides, real princesses don't have to go around calling attention to their fine points. You will all know who the princess is when the time comes;" and she looked so proud and queen-like, with her eyes flashing and her arms folded and her head tilted back, that all the other girls were really jealous of her.

"Stop your fuss!" shouted the constable, as half a dozen or more started to talk back to Hulda. "You don't any of you know anything about it. Leave it to the burgomaster and me!"

"Yes, leave it to me," commanded the burgomaster, thumping with his cane for quiet. "Leave it to me until I hear from the Baron von Dunderkrout. He has promised to send me word giving more particulars, so that we can tell which one of our foster maidens is the princess."

He had scarcely finished when someone shouted, "Look, there comes a messenger now!" And sure enough, cantering down the village street toward the square was a man on horseback, holding in his left hand a large yellow envelope.

CHAPTER VI

MORE NEWS

The villagers drew back and made way for the messenger as he rode into the square. He was mounted on a large black horse, and though he was not as gorgeously dressed as the great nobleman had been, he was nevertheless a very grand looking person. He stopped in front of the inn, and holding up the big yellow envelope he called out in a loud voice,

"A message to His Excellency the Burgomaster of Olenberg from His Highness the Baron von Dunderkrout."

Throwing back his shoulders and swelling out his big waistcoat, and doing his best to look intensely dignified, the burgomaster took off his hat and held it in the air, saying as he did so, "*I* am the burgomaster."

Whereupon the messenger moved his horse over to where he was standing and handed him the big yellow envelope.

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"Is there any answer?" asked the burgomaster, trying to appear cool.

"No," replied the messenger, turning his horse and preparing to go. "I was told simply to deliver the message into your hands."

"Very well," said the burgomaster, giving a cough; "very well. Tell His Highness the Baron von Dunderkrout, that I received his message and will give it due consideration. And you will carry to him, also, my kindest regards and my most profound good wishes."

"And mine, too," said the constable, making a low bow.

"And mine," added Pappy Grimm.

"In fact," said Pretzel, making a military salute, "we all send our greetings. And though it is a little ahead of the season, you may tell him from me, personally, that I wish him

"A very merry Christmas and a happy New Year,
With a pocket full of silver and a cellar full of beer."

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The messenger touched his hand to his hat, to indicate that he would obey; and the next moment he was speeding up the street toward the mountains, with everybody looking after him and admiring the way he rode—straight and erect and as firm in his saddle as though he was a very part of his fast-galloping horse.

As soon as he had disappeared from sight the burgomaster spread his feet apart and with much ceremony opened the big yellow envelope. Inside of it was a folded paper, covered over with bold, black writing. This he opened and spread out very carefully; and then, adjusting his spectacles, he held it out in front of him with his two hands and prepared to read the message, while the villagers crowded around in breathless eagerness to hear.

Even the old men and the many young girls and young women who were not orphans and could not therefore by any possibility be the princess, were just as much interested as the foster maidens themselves. They could hardly wait for the burgomaster to begin. Everybody was excited and trying to guess before-

hand which one of the dozen or more village girls would turn out to be a princess. Some thought this one, and some that; and, of course, each of the foster maidens herself felt sure that she must be the one, no matter how homely or how old she was. Louisa was all in a tremble. The two dairymaids stood first one way, then another. One tall, lanky, freckled girl got quite red with blushing. Matilda tried to look unconcerned, but anybody could see she was nervous. As for Hulda, she kept her eyes fixed on the burgomaster and held herself more haughtily than ever; while Gretchen, who had come into the square just in time to hear the news, stood with her pretty little hands clasped together, waiting patiently to hear what the burgomaster would read.

After casting his eye over the big, imposing sheet of paper on which the baron's message was written, the burgomaster looked out over the top of it and said, "Silence!" And instantly every voice was hushed and nobody moved. "I will now read what the Baron von Dunderkrout has to say," he went on, "and while I am

reading I want nobody to talk. This is a very serious and solemn occasion." He cleared his throat and took a deep breath. Then, holding the letter spread out before him, he read it aloud in his most pompous voice:

"*Maximus, Baron von Dunderkrout,*

"*To the Burgomaster and the people of Olenberg, greeting:—*

"*Hereby do I make it known to you, in the matter of the princess who is said to have been brought to your village as an infant, that there are no particulars to be had concerning her age or her identity, except only this, to wit: It has been learned that the nurse who packed the chest of clothes that was brought with the princess to the village, concealed in it somewhere a locket containing a miniature of the coat of arms of the noble family of Trexelheim, and a scrap of paper on which was written the true name of the child. Therefore, let search be made among the clothes chests of the foster maidens of your village, and in whosoever's is found this locket let her be made ready without delay, as she it is whom His Imperial Highness the Exalted Prince*

of Burgeldorf will make his bride. This is his wish and command. See to it, therefore, that his wishes are obeyed, and that all things are in proper readiness and order by high noon of Saturday, the fourteenth day of this month, when he will bestow upon your village the great honor of his presence."

The burgomaster slowly folded the letter, and looked impressively around. "So, there you have it," he said, tapping the folded paper; "there you have it. True, we do not yet know who is the Princess, but it should not take us long to find out. It ought to be a very simple matter; and yet, crackers and cucumbers! it is a very solemn matter; a most solemn matter. I see before me now—two—four—seven—ten—thirteen—thirteen young maidens, some of them pretty and some of them not, but all of them supposed to be just plain, common village folks like the rest of us, each waiting her time to marry some rough-and-ready village lad or some old stick, like Pretzel here; and yet, my friends, there is one among them who by this time next week will be wearing diamonds and silks and

riding in a golden carriage, with a coronet on her head, and we bowing our knees to her as the bride-elect of a royal prince. That is the solemn and the wonderful part of all this. To-day, a poor peasant lass; to-morrow, a princess. It is like a fairy tale. She is standing there before us now, and we do not know her. Sparkles and bangles! it is enough to turn our heads. But this is no time for speech-making! Run along now, everyone of you. Get out your old clothes boxes and see which one of you can find the locket."

The burgomaster did not have to tell them a second time. Even before he had finished speaking some of the more impolite ones had hurried off, and now there was a general scattering in all directions.

"Oh, dear me!" said Louisa, looking extremely worried, "I don't know whatever has become of the little clothes box that had my baby things in it. I have n't seen it for years. What would I do if I could n't find it? Oh, but it surely must be somewhere; it can't be lost. It can't be!" and talking half to herself and half

to some of her friends who wanted to go with her, she hastened away toward her home.

Matilda, too, could not remember what had become of the little chest that had come with her when she was brought to the village as a baby. But at the same time she felt sure that her foster mother, good Katrina Feesel, would know where it was, for she was always most careful about putting things away.

As for Hulda, she walked off with her head still high in the air, humming a little song to herself, as though there was no need to hurry. She was not going to let anybody know that she was excited. It was not becoming. She knew exactly where her little box was. She kept it in her room, on the table, and used it for keeping her ribbons and handkerchiefs in, for it was a very pretty box, made of polished wood and lined with velvet.

Two of her little foster sisters, who had come to the square with some of the other children, now ran up to her and taking her by the hand urged her to hurry home as fast as she could. "Oh, do hurry, Hulda!

Please do," they begged, pulling and tugging at her. "You surely are the Princess; we know you are. Oh, do hurry and try to find the locket!"

"Scat! go along with you!" answered Hulda, pulling her hand away. "If you think I am the Princess, I would thank you to treat me more like one!" and she carried herself so loftily, that the two little girls shrank back.

"She surely is a princess," they whispered to one another. "Oh, is n't it grand! And when she goes to live in a palace we 'll go to see her sometimes. Pappy will take us in the cart, and, Oh, won't we have a grand time!"

"You will do nothing of the sort," declared Hulda very decidedly. "You must remember you are not my sisters, and I won't have any old miller's cart driving into my palace grounds, nor any village ragamuffins like you coming to disgrace me with your common manners and your shabby clothes. I may send you some money now and then by one of my maids in waiting, but don't think that I am going to have anything more to do with

the family. No indeed! Remember, if you please, that a princess is not a miller's daughter;" and so saying she walked off in another direction and let the little girls go home by themselves.

In the meantime Gretchen, too, had started home,

and she had not gone far when her little foster brother, Dicky, caught sight of her and came running to join her. "O Gretchen, dear," he cried, "I 'm sure you are the Princess! I 'm just sure of it! Let us hurry and see if we can't find the locket. I shall be the proudest

boy in the village if we find it. And just think how proud Daddy will be, and Sister Mary. Oh, do hurry, Gretchen; don't poke so!"

Gretchen laughed and patted him on the head. "There is plenty of time," she replied. "And I don't believe you would be so glad, after all, if your sister turned out to be a princess; for then she would have to go away from you."

"I had n't thought of that," answered Dicky, looking very serious for a moment. "But then, just think," he went on, brightening up, "you will go to live in a palace and we can come to see you and take dinner with you and perhaps sometimes we could ride in the carriage with you. My! would n't that be grand!" and he clapped his hands at the thought of it.

"Perhaps it would," said Gretchen; "but don't you know, Dicky, I believe I would rather stay right here with you and Daddy and Sister Mary and little Rosalie, than be a princess and have to go and live in a palace without you."

"Oh, but perhaps we could all go, too," replied

Dicky, who had quite made up his mind that he wanted his sister to be a princess. "Yes indeed, we 'll all go along with you, so you won't be lonely, and we 'll have just the jolliest kind of times. My! won't we have fun, though?"

"But how about dear Cousin Carl?" asked Gretchen. "You know he wants me to marry him, as soon as he is twenty-one. And if I am a princess I shall have to marry the Prince."

Dicky scratched his head. He loved Cousin Carl very much. He thought he was the strongest and the bravest and the handsomest man in the whole world. There was not another young man in the village that could beat him at wrestling or running or who could strike such a powerful blow with an axe. And then, besides that, he was always so kind and generous and so full of fun and could sing such jolly songs and had such wonderful stories to tell of his adventures with bears and wolves, that little Dicky was never quite so happy as when he could be with Cousin Carl. "Of course," he said, after thinking it over a minute, "I

don't suppose you could marry Cousin Carl and the Prince, too; but I guess he would n't mind very much if you married the Prince. He could come and see you just the same as he does now and you could give him a fine black horse to ride on and a silver sword to kill bears with; and you could make him a general, to guard your palace, and no enemy could ever capture you if Cousin Carl was the general. He would n't have to be a woodchopper any more; so you see how much better it would be for him if you did marry the Prince. And would n't you, anyhow, much rather marry a prince than just a woodchopper?"

"No, I would n't," answered Gretchen, quickly. "If Carl *is* only a woodchopper he is a hundred times better and nobler than any prince I have ever heard about. Of course, Dicky, it would be just splendid to be a princess, a real, true princess, and have all the money you could wish for and be able to help everybody and give your friends everything they wanted or needed, and make every one you love comfortable and contented and happy. O Dicky, would n't that be

simply perfect! But just to live in a great palace and be a great lady and have lots of money to spend on jewels and dresses and ride about in fine coaches and never have any work to do, I don't believe I would be as happy as I am now. No, I am very sure I would n't."

Dicky could not understand that kind of talk. "Of course you would be happier," he declared; "a thousand times happier! I know *I* would. Just think of all the things you could buy—guns and swords and magic-lanterns and chocolate candy—my! it would be just like going to heaven;" and he went chattering on at a great rate, laughing and clapping his hands at the thought of what his sister could do if she were a princess.

Meanwhile the rest of the villagers went walking slowly away in twos and threes, all talking as hard as they could, discussing the wonderful news of the day and speculating as to which of the girls was most likely to be the fortunate one. Never in the history of the village had there been so much to talk about in one

day, and many a good housewife forgot all about getting supper or washing the children's faces.

Everybody was very grateful to Aunt Angelica for having told the news in the way she did. Even the burgomaster himself was glad, now that it was over; for the thought of making a speech had kept him agitated, and the fear that somebody might tell the news before half past seven had kept him in a state of great anxiety. Now, he felt calmer and was ready to discuss other matters. He wanted to get to work at once and plan for the Prince's visit; but Bumble and Pappy Grimm had walked off arm in arm, to get something to eat at the inn, and only Pretzel was left.

"Hi, there, Pretzel!" he called, "we must be thinking of what we are going to do next Saturday, to celebrate the arrival of the Prince. Waffles and gridirons! we have n't any too much time, let me tell you; and there 'll be a heap to do between now and then; an awful heap."

But the old town crier seemed to think he had done enough for one day. "You will have to excuse me,

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Mr. Burgomaster," he said, picking up his bell by the clapper and shaking the wrinkles out of his trousers; "but I am getting hungry for my supper; and moreover, I am feeling sad and lonely, to think that we are so soon to lose one of our cherished maidens. Ah me!" And without more words he walked off, singing mournfully to himself,

"I wish I had a soda cracker,
And some frizzled beef.
My stomach 's filled with appetite;
My heart is filled with grief."

CHAPTER VII

SURPRISES

Naturally, everybody hoped to hear sometime during the evening who the Princess was; but Saturday night passed and Sunday came and went and there was not a sign of any kind to tell who the lucky girl might be. By Monday morning there were still only rumors and guesses and all kinds of gossip going around, without anybody's knowing anything for certain. Some had heard it was this girl, and some had heard it was that one, and others were sure it would prove to be the one they were most interested in; and the good housewives neglected their morning sweeping to lean on their broom handles and ask one another why in the world it should take the girls such a precious long time to examine their baby clothes boxes.

But it seems that a number of the foster maidens of the village had a hard time finding the little chests and trunks that had held their baby clothes. And those

who could not find theirs by the time they went to bed on Saturday had to wait until Monday to go on with the search, for the good people of Olenberg were very good indeed and never allowed anything to be done on Sunday that could possibly be kept over until the next day. Therefore, in spite of everybody's curiosity, all hunting for the locket or even talking about it—except in the quietest kind of whispers—was given up during Sunday.

Some of the clothes boxes had been hidden away under things in the attics and required all kinds of rummaging around to find them. One or two had been broken and thrown into the woodshed long ago, and now there was the most frantic searching for the pieces; and still another had been given away and had passed on from one family to another, without anybody's knowing just where it was at present. But even such of the girls who had their boxes safe and had gone right home Saturday afternoon and turned them inside out, were not ready to say whether or not they had found the precious locket. Each felt sure it must be

hidden somewhere in her box, and not one was willing to give up hope until she had gone over it a dozen times, looking for secret drawers or false bottoms and then finally ripping out all the lining and even going so far as to take the box completely to pieces. And even then some of them would not tell whether or not they had found it.

Louisa had not found her clothes box until Monday morning. Then, at last, after a most anxious search, she discovered it in a closet. It was a clumsy old chest and quite heavy, and was filled with a lot of her old baby dresses and toys. These she tumbled out on the floor, without stopping to examine them, and turned the box upside down and shook it; but nothing more came out. She thumped on it, and felt all over it, and banged it up and down, and poked a knife into all the cracks, and then loosened the bottom of it with a hammer. But it was no use. She could not make a locket come out of it.

Then, all at once, she caught sight of one of the toys that had fallen on the floor. It was a little china pig.

In tumbling out of the box its head had come off, and she was surprised to see that its body was stuffed with cotton. She did not remember ever having seen this before, and a sudden thought flashed through her

mind. Quickly dropping the hammer she hastily snatched up the headless piggie and poked her finger into its cotton stuffing. "Oh, dear me! what have I found?" and she gave a little scream. With trembling fingers she pulled out the top layer of cotton, and there, before her very eyes, lay a tiny locket.

She was so excited at first, she hardly dared to touch it. She just gazed at it and her eyes looked as though they were going to pop from her head. Finally, she picked it up and held it in her hand, and before she knew what she was doing she began to jump about and shout "O joy! O joy! I have found it! I am the Princess!"

She could not keep it to herself. She must tell somebody at once, or she felt she would burst. She ran to the door and saw Pretzel walking along on the opposite side of the street. "O Pretzel," she cried, hopping up and down and holding out the locket, "I am the Princess! I am the Princess! See, see! I have found the locket!" And then, before Pretzel had time to collect his senses, she dashed back into the house, to tell her Aunty Ann.

When Pretzel realized what he had heard and seen he stopped short and gazed across the street at the open doorway where Louisa had been hopping up and down. "Well, upon my word," he said; "what next? Louisa a princess. Hoity-toity!

"This is indeed a funny world and filled with strange surprises;
You can't be sure how old you are or even what your size is.

You think you know what 's going to be, and when and where and how,
But, hoity-toity, bless my stars, just see what 's happened now!

"However, if that 's the news, I can't do anything but announce it. That 's my business—and business before pleasure." Whereupon he began ringing his bell and singing out:

"Harken to me now; hark if you please-a:
The locket 's been found by the old maid Louisa."

If he had been a moment or two later, however, he never would have started to spread this exciting news about town; for as soon as Louisa showed the locket to

her aunty, who had come running in from the garden to see what had happened, that old woman took hold of Louisa's shoulder and gave her a vigorous shake. "Why, Louisa," she exclaimed, "whatever in the world has got into you! Don't you remember that locket? It 's got your godmother's picture in it. That 's no princess locket. Really, Louisa, I think sometimes you have n't good sense. You ought to be ashamed of yourself, a girl of your age, cutting up such didos and shouting around here like a house a-fire, thinking you 're a princess! Go peel the potatoes now, and behave yourself!" and she turned around and walked back into the garden, leaving poor Louisa so astonished and disappointed that she sank into a rocking chair and cried like everything.

And while this was going on Hulda, too, was weeping with disappointment. But only she herself knew anything about it. She had locked herself in her room and had searched and searched, in the hope of finding the locket. And not until she had ripped and hammered the box all to pieces and examined every scrap

In fact, she felt that she would like to run away and never come back. But the woods were so quiet and so cool and so fresh with the morning breezes, that she quickly grew calmer as she went along, until finally she sat down on a fallen log at the edge of a stream, and dipping her handkerchief into the cold mountain water bathed the tear stains from her cheeks and cooled her burning eyes.

She had just spread her handkerchief on the log to dry, when she heard a noise like a footstep. Peering through the clump of bushes in front of her she caught a glimpse of someone coming slowly through the woods. She was not able to see at once who it was, on account of the trees and bushes; so she kept still and watched, hoping that whoever it was would not come her way, for she did not yet feel like talking to anyone. In another moment she caught sight of the person. It was Gretchen. She was carrying a box under her arm and was picking her way quietly up the hill toward a smooth flat rock a short distance in front of where Hulda was sitting.

"Aha," thought Hulda to herself; "this is the way good Gretchen does it: She brings her box out into the woods to search for the locket, so that she can be alone and not give any of the village busybodies a chance to meddle in her business. I wonder I did n't think of that myself. But, all the same, she shan't have any secrets from me! I 'll just keep quiet behind this bush, where I can watch her without her seeing me, and if she *should* find the locket she shan't have the satisfaction of being the first to tell it in the village. I 'll spread the news myself and spoil that much of her fun, anyhow. But I know she won't find it. She 's too goody-goody to be a princess."

While these thoughts were going through Hulda's head, Gretchen reached the rock and seated herself on it, with her back to Hulda. She would have been greatly astonished had she known how close Hulda was, for she had no idea that there was anyone in the woods besides herself. Like Hulda, she had come out here to be alone; not because she was disappointed or had been crying, for she had not yet examined her box,

but because she felt there was something mysterious, something sacred, about seeking to unveil the past which might mean so much to her. And so she had come into the woods to be alone while making the search for the locket; and if she should find it she wanted to be able to keep it to herself for a little while. And out here, away from everybody, she could do this and would not have to talk about it to anyone until she had got over the excitement of it and could be calm and composed as a true princess should be.

Placing the box on her lap (for it was a small one and she had had no trouble in carrying it), Gretchen took a key from her pocket and opened the lid. She had taken out what few things she usually kept in it, so that it was now quite empty. It was lined with padded pink silk. If the locket was anywhere it was hidden somewhere in this lining, for there was no other place where it could possibly be, as the box was otherwise perfectly plain, without compartments or drawers or pockets of any kind. Gretchen had brought a pair of scissors with her, and with these she began now to

rip open the upper edge of the lining on one side of the box. After getting a start she soon had it opened from one corner to the other and was just beginning to on down the side edge, so that she could turn the lining back, when suddenly, close beside her, she heard a deep growl.

Looking up quickly she saw, only a few feet away from her, a great, shaggy brown bear. He was standing perfectly still, gazing at her with his little black eyes and with his big red mouth wide open. For an instant she was too frightened to move or to think. But when the bear suddenly gave another growl and moved a step nearer, she jumped from her seat with a piercing scream and dropping the box on the ground ran down the hill as fast as a deer could have gone forgetting all about lockets and princesses and everything else, except the sight of that awful bear.

Hulda, too, was frightened nearly sick. She knew the bear had not seen her, but that did not make him any the less dangerous or any less frightful. With a smothered cry of alarm, she threw herself over behind

the log and started to run straight through the stream, without ever thinking how deep it might be or how wet she would get. But happening to glance back as she went sliding down the bank she saw that the bear had also taken to his heels and was going off through the woods on a wild trot. Gretchen had probably scared him as much as he had frightened her, and without waiting to hear any more screams he had turned about and was now making for his cave in the mountains as fast as his clumsy legs would take him.

"Pooh! he 's nothing to be afraid of," said Hulda to herself, as she crouched behind the log and watched him disappear over the top of the hill. "I 'd be ashamed to be such a coward as Gretchen," and being sure that the bear was now out of sight she got up and looked about her with the air of quite a superior somebody.

She was about to start down the hill and go home, when she suddenly thought of Gretchen's box. She stopped and looked eagerly in the direction in which Gretchen had gone. There was no sign of her. The

coast was clear. Pushing her way through the bushes she went over to where Gretchen had been sitting and picked up the box. Its lid had slammed shut in the fall, but had not locked. Placing it on the rock, Hulda opened it quickly, with a nervous little jerk. Then, casting a hurried look down the hill, to see that no one was coming, she stealthily turned back the lining where Gretchen had ripped it, and put her hand in behind it and began feeling about with her fingers.

Suddenly she felt something. Her heart almost stopped beating. It was something hard and smooth and round. Very carefully, so as not to tear the lining, she worked her fingers in until she could take hold of it. There was no longer any doubt about it: It was a locket!

She drew it out and held it in her hand—a smooth gold locket with a little diamond in its center. Her heart now was beating so fast that she actually trembled. The falling of a leaf nearby made her jump. Again she looked anxiously about to see if anyone was in sight; but she was alone. No one had seen her. With

her thumb nail she quickly pried the locket open. Yes, it contained the very things that had been mentioned in the Baron's letter: There, on one side, in beautiful colors, was a coat of arms—a picture of two lions standing one on each side of a red shield, and across the white center of the shield was the word "Trexelheim," —and on the other side of the locket was pasted a bit of paper on which was written in very small letters, "Diana Victoria Theresa." It was the name of the Princess.

"The Princess Diana of Trexelheim," said Hulda, speaking aloud to herself. "Oh, is n't that a perfectly beautiful name!" And repeating it once again she slowly snapped the locket shut. "And does that goody-goody Gretchen, that old weaver's daughter, deserve such a title and such good fortune as this? Indeed, she does not! and what 's more, she shan't have it! I am every bit as much a princess as she is; and more, too. I have found the locket, and it 's mine, and I 'm going to keep it!" Clasping it tightly in her hand, she hurriedly smoothed the lining of the box into place as

she had found it, so that Gretchen might not suspect anything; and then, shutting up the box, put it back on the ground where Gretchen had let it fall.

Once more she looked around. There was still no one in sight. Nobody had seen what she had done, and nobody could ever know. The locket was hers. She should be the Princess after all! And with a little shout of triumph and a fast beating heart she walked off through the woods. She did not go straight down the hill, for fear of meeting Gretchen, but followed a path that took her around by the stream and which would bring her into the village past the mill.

She had scarcely disappeared when there was a sound of voices and footsteps coming up the hill. Gretchen was returning, and with her was Carl, the woodchopper, carrying an axe on his shoulder. This was the Cousin Carl whom Gretchen had mentioned when talking to Dicky on Saturday afternoon. And, really, it is no wonder that Dicky admired him so much and was proud to call him "cousin." He was tall and broad-shouldered, with fine brown eyes and dark, wavy

hair; and now as he came walking through the woods with his sleeves rolled up, showing the muscles of his splendid arms, and his big, heavy axe resting as easily on his shoulder as though it were a golf club, anyone would have felt at once that there was nothing to fear from wild animals or any other danger while Carl was near. He had been at work in another part of the woods, but had heard Gretchen scream as she ran from the bear. At the sound of her voice he had grabbed his axe and running to see what was the matter had met her just as she reached the foot of the hill. As soon as she could get her breath she told him about the bear. She had got over her fright by this time and was now worried only about the box she had left behind, and Carl had offered at once to go back with her and get it. If there had been two bears waiting for her on the hill she would not have been afraid to face them with Carl by her side; he was so brave and strong and could have killed them each with a single blow of his axe.

On their way up through the woods Gretchen told him how she had been looking for the locket; so that by

the time they reached the rock and found the box, Carl was as anxious as she to go on with the work of taking out the lining. And really he seemed more disappointed than Gretchen herself when, after ripping out all the pretty padded silk, there was no sign of a locket anywhere.

"Oh, but I did feel so sure that you would be the Princess," he said; "and I had so hoped, for your sake, that you would find the locket;" and as he spoke he took one of her little hands in his and patted it. "I am so sorry," he added; "so sorry for you."

Gretchen's lip trembled, and in spite of herself the tears came to her eyes. It was a disappointment to her, a great disappointment; but she tried bravely not to show it. She, too, had dreamed of palaces and diamonds and carriages and gowns and plenty of money with which to make others happy; and she, too, had felt in her heart that she was something more than a common peasant girl, and that the locket would surely be found in her possession.

"It is all right, Carl," she said, trying hard to smile

as she put the pieces of lining back into the box and closed it up; "it is all right. What would Daddy and the children have done without me had I been the Princess and been obliged to go away, and how could I have been happy without them? And then, too, Carl,

do you forget that I have promised to marry you? I would have had to break my promise."

"Yes, that 's so," answered Carl very slowly; "but I knew that that would have to be. A woodchopper could never hope to marry a princess. And I was not

thinking of myself, Gretchen. I was only thinking how happy you would be as a great lady and the bride of a great prince."

"Yes," said Gretchen, brushing away a tear; "it sounds very fine; but don't let 's talk about it. Deep down in my heart I know I could never have been as contented with a prince in a great palace with maids and servants to wait upon me, as I shall be with you, Carl, in a little cottage with only myself to bake the bread and sweep the floors and—and pick potato bugs," and Gretchen gave a little laugh to choke back the sob that wanted to come out. "So come along," she cried, tucking the box under her arm; "I must be getting back to the village and you must be at work." And together they wandered off down the hill.

Before they got quite to the edge of the woods Carl turned aside, to go back to his work; and Gretchen, waving her hand and calling good-bye, started off across the fields toward the village. A short distance ahead of her, standing on the top of a little slope overlooking the town and the mountains beyond, was a

lovely cottage. It was half hidden in the midst of a large garden, all pink and red and yellow with hollyhocks and roses; and shutting it all in snugly from the world was a hedge of mingled sweet briar and honeysuckle. Trumpet vines and wistaria clambered up the walls of the cottage and peeped in at the windows, and its two tall chimneys were twined about with beautiful rose vines.

Gretchen never came in sight of this cottage without stopping to gaze at it. She called it her fairy home. She could not picture to herself anything lovelier or sweeter or more to be desired than this charming place on the hill. Of course, as she often told herself, it was all nonsense to think that it could ever really be her home; but nevertheless she liked to think about it and dream about it and imagine herself living in it. The price that the owner wanted for it was more than she or Daddy Rosengarten or Carl or anybody else in the village could ever think of paying. The owner did not live in it any more. He had moved away years ago. Only an old caretaker lived on the place, to see that

everything was kept in order; and although he was not allowed to let strangers go into the cottage or even walk in the garden, he did once permit Gretchen to go all over the place, and she never tired of telling Mary and Dicky how beautiful it all was, or of dreaming how perfectly lovely it would be if a fairy godmother should come along some day and say to her, "This is your home, your very own, with all its flowers and its trees and its vegetable gardens and its chickens and its cow and its bees and all the pretty furniture and china and pictures and everything else that is in the house."

She had stopped now and was once more feasting her eyes upon it as it lay before her like a beautiful picture in the soft light of the cool, summer morning. "Of course, it can never be mine," she said aloud to herself; "I ought to know that; but it 's fun to imagine pleasant things, even if they never can come true. Why, just think of it: for the past two days I have been imagining I was a princess, with enough money to buy a dozen such beautiful cottages; and, Oh, how wonderful it all seemed; just like a lovely, lovely dream!

And that is all it was," she added quickly, with a little catch in her throat; "only a dream, and I must n't be wasting any more thoughts over it. I have other things of more importance to look after, and I have already spent too much time chasing this pretty dream bubble. I must get back and finish my sweeping."

And so saying, she started off again toward the village, with a smile upon her face and humming a little tune that Carl had taught her.

CHAPTER VIII

PREPARATIONS

Hulda had hardly got to the village when someone called out to her, "O Hulda, have you heard the news? Louisa is the princess!"

"Pouf!" replied Hulda, tossing her head; "it is n't so," and without more words she walked right along toward the public square. She had not yet told anyone about her having the locket. She wanted plenty of people about when she made the announcement, and that is why she went at once to the square. Here she felt sure she would have an opportunity of telling with good effect the important news about herself. Nor was she mistaken. Quite a number of men, women and children were gathered about in groups near the inn, all talking together very earnestly. Among them were the burgomaster and the constable and Pretzel, and also Aunt Angelica and Mammy Grimm.

As they spied Hulda some of the children called out, "Hi-o, Hulda! we surely thought you would be the Princess; but it 's Louisa. Just think of it—Louisa! Did you ever hear anything so surprising?"

"Who says it 's Louisa?" demanded Hulda, looking about her in a most lofty manner. "Have you all lost your senses? How could such an old maid as that be the Princess?"

"Oh, but Pretzel says so," answered several voices; "and it is so, is n't it, Pretzel?"

"Louisa told me so herself," replied Pretzel. "That 's all I know about it."

"Then she 's crazy," said Hulda; "for Louisa is not the Princess."

"How 's that!" cried the burgomaster. "Who says Louisa is not the Princess? Fiddles and kettledrums! I hope it 's so. Louisa is no fit person to be a princess! And why is n't she here to explain herself? I commanded her to be here half an hour ago, to show us the locket; the token of her royal title."

Before anybody could answer him, Matilda Feesel

came running into the square. Her face was aglow with delight. "Oh," she cried, "it 's all a crazy mistake! Louisa is not the Princess! She found the wrong kind of a locket, the silly thing; and now she 's too much ashamed of herself to come and tell anybody."

At this news everybody shouted with laughter. Some even clapped their hands.

"Be quiet!" commanded the constable. "This is no laughing matter. First thing you know, I 'll arrest somebody!"

"Yes," said the burgomaster; "Bumble is right; this is no laughing matter. We have had a narrow escape. But now the question is: Who is the Princess?"

Casting off her bonnet and stepping forward toward the burgomaster, Hulda held up her hands with a commanding gesture and called out in a loud, clear voice: "I am the Princess! Behold in me the Princess Diana Victoria Theresa of Trexelheim, bride-elect of His Imperial Highness the Exalted Prince of Burgeldorf!"

And truly, nobody could have looked more like a

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princess than did Hulda at that moment, as she stood there before the village folks with her arms upraised, her dark eyes flashing, her silken black hair glinting in the sunlight, and her tall, slender figure drawn up to its full height. It is no wonder that the villagers burst into hurrahs and that the boys and men threw their hats into the air, and that the girls and even some of the fat old ladies capered about with joy and satisfaction. And for once Constable Bumble did not stop the noise, but hurrahed himself as loudly as anybody and thumped his stick against the doorpost to add to the celebration.

"Roses and gingerbread!" cried the burgomaster, beaming all over his big, round face; "this is something like! And now, Hulda—Princess, I mean—Princess Diana, I must ask that you will show me the locket upon which you lay your claim to this high title. It is necessary that I should examine it officially."

"Certainly," responded Hulda, holding it out to him; "there it is."

The burgomaster took it, and waving everybody away from him, opened it with his silver-handled

pocketknife and carefully examined its contents. "Ahem," he said, putting on a solemn scowl; "ahem! This is undoubtedly the token which proclaims you the Princess Diana Victoria Theresa of Trexelheim, and I do hereby so announce it, and declare it, and make it known. You hear what I say, Pretzel?—I do hereby announce under my official hand and seal, that Hulda, and not Louisa, is the Princess Diana Victoria Theresa."

"Aye, aye," answered Pretzel; and putting his hat on straight, he picked up his bell. "It shall be made known at once;" and he walked off across the square singing out at the top of his rusty voice:

"It was all a mistake in regard to Louisa:
She is n't the Princess Diana Theresa.
The only real genuine Princess Diana,
Is Hulda von Dinkel who plays the piana."

"Aye, long live Hulda, the Princess Diana!" shouted the burgomaster, and all the people repeated it

after him in chorus. And then half a dozen of the big boys of the village lifted Hulda up on their shoulders, to carry her home in royal style, and as they went across the square and up the street a procession of men, women and children followed after, waving handkerchiefs and hats and repeating over and over in ringing voices, "Long live the Princess Diana!"

"And now," said the burgomaster, addressing the constable and Pappy Grimm and Aunt Angelica, "we must get to work. We have very important matters, most important matters, still to settle. Remember, the Prince will be here on Saturday, at noon, at high noon, and we must be prepared with some fitting celebration; and moreover, the Princess must be made ready and dressed up in becoming style; and as for me, I must prepare a speech, a grand speech of welcome."

It was indeed true that there was no time to lose. Saturday was but five days off, and there was much to be done. Fortunately, Aunt Angelica was a good manager, and she undertook to look after Hulda and see that she was taught just what to do and what not to do when

the Prince arrived, for it would never do not to have her behave like a princess. And then, too, there was the all-important question of clothes. She must be dressed like a princess. There was no doubt about that; but how was it to be done? None of the village store-keepers kept such goods as princesses' gowns are made of, and, moreover, nobody in the village had the money to buy such an expensive outfit. Here, indeed, was a most serious question at the very outset; and Aunt Angelica and several of the other older women of the village spent nearly the whole day together, trying to figure it out.

They had finally decided that the only thing to be done was to make over a cream-colored silk dress that Aunt Angelica had worn as a bridesmaid a great many years ago, when they were relieved of all further trouble about it, in a most unexpected and surprising manner. Early Tuesday morning a messenger arrived in a coach, bringing with him as a gift from the Prince of Burgeldorf a most magnificent outfit for the Princess who was to be his bride. Never had the people of

Olenberg seen such clothes—such wonderful linen, such delicate lace, such marvelous embroidery, such exquisite silk and satin. And as for the bridal dress itself, it almost toppled them over. Its strings of pearls and its collar of diamonds were alone enough to make them

gasp, to say nothing of the dazzling beauty of its material and the wonderful way it was made.

For the next two days there was nothing else that the women and girls could talk about. Even the men shook their heads and said it certainly did beat all. As

for Hulda, she was the only one who took it as a matter of course and appeared quite cool about it. Indeed, as the days went by, Hulda grew more and more lofty and put on more arrogant airs. She would not have anything more to do with her old friends, except to nod to them in a condescending way; and if they forgot themselves and called her "Hulda," instead of "Your Highness," or "Princess Diana," she did not notice them at all.

She was particularly ungracious to Gretchen, which neither Gretchen nor anyone else could understand; for Gretchen had no envious feelings toward Hulda and was the only one of all the foster maidens who had gone to her and told her she was glad for her and wished her happiness. She never let Hulda feel that she was disappointed, as some of the others did very plainly; and, indeed, she tried hard not to be, and when the tears sometimes would come she would begin to sing or tell herself that she could never really have been happy without her Daddy and the children and her good, handsome Carl.

But Hulda had not any such thoughts about leaving *her* family. She was only too well pleased at the prospect of getting away from them; and, to tell the truth, they were no less pleased at the thought of getting rid of Hulda. She had always been bother enough as a plain nobody, but now that she had a title and was making ready to wed the Prince she was like a tyrant in the household, and made everybody stand around and take orders from her and bow and scrape, until everyone of them—from little Sally Dinkel up to old Grandpa Dinkel, who lived with the family and slept in the woodshed—was afraid to so much as whisper or walk across the room while she was about.

As a matter of fact, everybody in the village was soon more than half afraid to meet her or have anything to say to her, she was so haughty and domineering and said such unpleasant things about "country folks" and "clodhoppers" and "village bumpkins." When the cheese-maker's son, whom she had intended some day to marry, brought her a bouquet of daisies, she threw them on the ground and demanded to know

what he meant by bringing such common, cheap flowers to a princess; and the cheese-maker's son was so much abashed that he actually began to blubber. Even to Aunt Angelica she put on airs and paid very little attention to the advice she gave her; telling her it was not for an old woman like her to order a princess about.

The burgomaster was perhaps the only one to whom she was more respectful. But he saw very little of her during these busy days, and thought still less about her. He was too busy planning for the celebration and preparing his speech. He put Hulda quite out of his mind. He felt sure that Aunt Angelica would see that she did her part correctly, and he was not going to bother himself about that portion of the program. He was already worried nearly sick looking after his end of the proceedings.

There were the fireworks to be provided for, and the decorations, and the music, and the military drill, and his speech and his costume and a dozen other things besides, to say nothing of teaching Constable Bumble and Pappy Grimm how to bow in true aristocratic style.

Altogether, he felt that he had his hands more than full, and the shorter the time became the more excited he grew and the more certain he felt that things would not go right.

Nor was he the only one who felt nervous. Nearly

everyone was more or less worked up about the Prince's coming, and was kept busy helping to prepare for the great event. There were clothes to be made, and ribbons and sashes to be bought, and flags to be got ready, and old cavalier hats and brass-buttoned coats to be

brought down from the attics, and houses to be decorated, and fences to be painted, and in addition to everything else, there was an immense amount of talking that had to be done and no end of running back and forth from one house to another; so that the five days were filled to overflowing with work and bustle and chatter.

The old village had never before been so full of stir and excitement. To have a princess in their midst was alone enough to fluster the people, but the prospect of seeing a real prince, a real, live crown prince, was positively thrilling. Nobody had ever seen one. Even Aunt Angelica had never seen anything bigger than a duke, and that was when she was such a little girl that she could not remember it. If just a plain nobleman like the Baron von Dunderkrout looked so magnificent, what did the Prince look like? Hulda condescended to tell some of the girls that there was no use of their bothering their heads trying to imagine how her royal spouse, the Crown Prince, was going to look; for she could tell them that he was grander and handsomer

and more elegant than anything they could ever dream of. She showed them a picture of a great general she had cut out of a book—a splendid, tall, broad-shouldered man, with the most beautiful hair and most charming mustache,—and she told them that this would look like a penny valentine alongside the Prince of Burgeldorf. All of which made the girls more impatient than ever for the day to come when they might set their eyes on so wonderful a being.

Even Pretzel, in thinking it over, decided that so great a personage was deserving of something more than a speech and a brass band by way of welcome; and accordingly he made up his mind to compose an ode, a song of welcome, and sing it out loud when the Prince arrived. He spoke to the burgomaster about it, and the burgomaster said it would be all right, provided it did not interfere with his speech. So Pretzel went to work on it at once, and when he had finished it he offered to rehearse it to the burgomaster.

"All right," said the burgomaster; "go ahead. will listen to you while I 'm polishing up my epaulets.

And by the way, Pretzel, you must remember that when you mention the Prince's name in the ode you must bow."

"I know that," responded Pretzel. "In fact, it is no more than proper that I should keep bowing most of the time that I am singing. Consequently, I have brought in his name very frequently. The only trouble is that it takes so many rhymes, and 'prince' is not a good name for rhyming. However, I have done the best I could," and without further remarks Pretzel began:

> "*Hail, hail, O great and mighty one,*
> *Courageous as the morning sun.*
> *We welcome thee, O noble Prince,*
> *With happy shouts and humble squints.*"

"What 's that about 'squints?' " asked the burgomaster, interrupting him.

"Don't we have to *squint* when we look at the sun?" replied Pretzel. "I consider that a particularly fine rhyme;" and clearing his throat he went on with the second verse:

"Hail, hail, kind sir with noble brow,
Majestic as the chestnut bough.
Hail, hail, O hail, O worthy Prince,
Superb as perfumed peppermints."

"Very good, Pretzel," remarked the burgomaster; "very good; especially the last line. That 's real poetry."

"I thought you would like that," said Pretzel; "and here 's the third verse:

"Hail, hail, O grand and glorious guest,
With velvet coat and silken vest.
We welcome thee, O noble Prince,
As none before have ever since."

"I don't understand the last part of that," said the burgomaster.

"Neither do I," answered Pretzel. " It is not for us to understand. It is meant only for the Prince. And now I will sing you the fourth verse:

"Hail, hail once more, thou portly man,
Full gorgeous as a pelican!
You make us all as happy, Prince,
As butterflies in potted quince."

"Hm," said the burgomaster, scratching his ear; "that sounds all right, as music; but I don't altogether understand this talk about 'pelicans' and 'potted quince.' What is a *pelican?*"

"I 'm not sure just what it is," answered Pretzel; "but I think it 's a bird of some kind. It is n't the kind of a bird I want, but it 's the only one that will rhyme. *Peacock* is what I really mean. But you must remember, Mr. Burgomaster, that this is poetry I am singing to you; not prose; and you must n't be so particular about the meaning of words."

"Well, perhaps you are right, Pretzel," responded the burgomaster. "You 're a professional poet and ought to know your business, but it seems to me I would be a little careful about calling the Prince a pelican until you know for sure what sort of a look-

ing creature it is and what its habits are. And what 's that last line about 'potted quince'? I don't remember ever having heard of potted quince. What sort of molasses is it?"

Pretzel did not answer the burgomaster's question. He simply said, "And now I will sing you the fifth verse."

"No, I don't think you will," said the burgomaster "I have heard enough. I have not time to listen to any more. I have other things to attend to; a thousand other things. Remember, this is Friday afternoon, and I have n't finished my speech yet, and there 's Captain Rudolph to be talked to about firing off the cannon. Barrels and boxes! Pretzel, you must help me to see that everything goes through all right to-morrow! Be on hand early, and, above all things, don't forget to wear a rose in your buttonhole; a red rose, with a leaf or

two. And I hope to goodness old Charlie Potts won't forget to ring the church bell! Skittles and patchwork! I tell you, Pretzel, this is going to be a great day; a great day!"

CHAPTER IX

EXCITEMENT

Saturday morning dawned bright and cool. Nobody could have asked for more delightful weather. It was just the right sort for a great celebration; and surely the people of Olenberg never expected again to take part in so great a celebration as the one they were going to have to-day.

Before the sun had arisen over the mountain top they were all dressed and had had their breakfasts and were out on the streets; for old Charlie Potts had rung the church bell at four o'clock, so that everybody might be sure to be up in good season. And never had there been seen all at one time so many pretty dresses, with such beautiful bows and sashes and gay-looking hats and spick-span bonnets, and so many fine suits of clothes. Some of the men had on embroidered vests

and swallowtail coats; others had plumes and cockades in their hats; while quite a number had big silver buckles on their shoes; and everyone, no matter what sort of a suit he had on, wore a large red rose in his buttonhole and carried a cane. All the little girls wore wreaths of flowers on their heads and white stockings on their legs, and carried fans. And all the little boys wore red stockings and had each a peacock feather in his hat and a spray of heliotrope pinned on the lapel of his coat.

And if the people were gaily dressed, so was the town. Everywhere were flags and banners, and the brick pavements shone from the scourings they had all had the day before. The inn and all the houses facing the square were decorated with bright-colored streamers and bunting and garlands of flowers. The musicians' platform was trimmed with flags and honeysuckle and had been fitted up with chairs for the burgomaster and the other village dignitaries. And in the center of the square there had been built another platform with a large throne-like seat in the middle of it

for the Princess Diana. There were steps leading up to the throne and over it was a canopy held up by four pillars. The throne and the pillars were covered with yellow cloth, to resemble gold, and the canopy was of blue silk with little gilt stars sprinkled about on it, to represent the sky; while over it all were clusters and festoons of roses and trailing asparagus vines.

Although the Prince was not to arrive until noon, the people had begun to gather in the square as early as eight o'clock; for there was to be music there by the brass band off and on during the morning; and the military company, after parading the streets, was to do some fancy drilling. The villagers were very proud of their soldier company; and now as the boomerladdies came marching into the square, with fifes playing and drums beating, and Captain Rudolph strutting ahead with a sword on his shoulder, they all clapped their hands and joined with the soldiers in their marching song:

"Now forward march as on to war;
We have our muskets ready.
We 've fought before; we 'll fight some more;
So forward march and steady!

Hurrah, hurrah! a-rum, tum-tum,
Here come the soldier laddies!
They come, they come, with fife and drum,
The bumpity boomerladdies!
A-rum, tum-tum, a-rum, tum-tum,
A-bumpity-bum, bum-bum!"

Even after the soldiers halted in the center of the square some of the girls and boys wanted to keep on singing, they felt so happy and excited; but Constable Bumble would not permit it.

"Stop!" he called, holding up his stick; "not another word, or I 'll arrest somebody!"

He had had orders from the burgomaster not to allow any excitement to break loose, and he was determined, therefore, to check at once any signs of dis-

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order. And to-day everybody was ready to obey him without question, for he carried an extra large stick and had on a most imposing hat. It had been a fireman's hat at one time, but had been done over and painted green and decorated with gold cord and tassels, and as it came down to the top of his ears and stuck out very far behind it gave him an unusually fierce expression. He also wore a long green coat with brass buttons and a pair of very tight green trousers; so that taking him altogether he looked so new and unusual, that nobody dared to be funny with him.

Pretzel, too, had a special costume for the occasion. His hat and coat were the same as usual, except that he had cleaned his coat with soap tree bark, but in place of his old pantaloons he wore a pair of red velvet knee breeches with white stockings and silver-buckled slippers. He carried his bell by the clapper and had very little to say to anyone, for he was memorizing his ode and humming it over to himself every now and then. It was to be a surprise to the people as well as to the Prince. Besides, he had been given the special duty of

keeping a lookout for the approach of the Prince and his party, and he felt it necessary, therefore, to walk up the street every little while and look out along the road toward the mountain.

Of course, the burgomaster had the finest costume of all. It was a real regimental uniform—blue coat and knee breeches, with enormous gilt buttons and epaulets and buckles and a broad white sash worn slantwise across his chest. His coat collar and cuffs were trimmed with gold braid, as was also his cocked hat which had a large rosette on one side of it. The coat did not fit him particularly well. It had belonged to his grandfather, who was a much taller man than the burgomaster and not nearly so stout, so that he had some trouble in buttoning it and in keeping the sleeves up. Hanging on his left side was a sword, hitched to a red belt around his waist. He was not accustomed to carrying a sword; and when he was not watching, it got tangled up in his legs. But this was a small matter. The villagers all thought he looked extremely grand and were very proud to have so hand-

some a burgomaster to show to the Prince. He was himself immensely pleased with his own appearance, though at the same time he felt decidedly uncomfortable in these unaccustomed clothes and was greatly disturbed about everything in general. It was a tremendous responsibility to be at the head of such a celebration, and before the morning was half over he was puffing and perspiring and strutting excitedly about from place to place demanding to know how things were getting along.

"Hi there, Angelica," he called out as he spied Aunt Angelica moving sedately over toward the throne; "where 's Hulda? Why don't she come? Crackers and cucumbers! it 's going on half past eleven, and it 's time she was here!"

"She will be here presently," replied Aunt Angelica, quietly. "There is no hurry. And by the way," she added, "your hat is on backwards."

"Bah!" retorted the burgomaster, "don't you bother about me. You look after Hulda! If you had half as

much on your mind as I have, you would be lucky to have your hat on at all!"

He pulled up his sleeves and was about to say something more, when a great shout went up from the people and the band began to play, and the next instant an open carriage drawn by two white horses came into the square; and sitting in the carriage by herself in the midst of a pile of flowers, was Hulda, the Princess Diana. If the villagers had not known beforehand who it was they would scarcely have recognized her in her magnificent bridal array. She did indeed look regal, and was so intensely lofty that she appeared not to hear the applause of the people or even to notice that they were anywhere about.

The burgomaster at once bustled forward, and holding his hat in one hand he helped her out of the carriage with the other and escorted her up the steps of the throne; while little Betsy Dinkel and Miranda Dinkel, dressed all in white, followed after, holding up her long train. At sight of her gorgeous dress, sparkling and shining in the sunlight, the people stopped

their shouting to stare and marvel and rub their eyes; and as she seated herself on the throne and opened a magnificent fan made of ostrich plumes, with the two little Dinkels standing one on each side of her like

maids in waiting, the villagers burst out into exclamations of wonder and delight. In spite of the fact that Hulda had made herself so disagreeable to all of them, and was even now too haughty to look at them, they

could not but admire her appearance and feel proud at the thought that they used to be on friendly terms with this grand princess.

Even her fellow foster maidens could not help being impressed with her grandeur and the queenly way in which she behaved herself, notwithstanding their own bitter disappointment and their other bitter feelings. If anyone could have looked into their hearts he would have seen them filled with spite and envy and jealousy, and the deepest sort of resentment at the cruel and scornful manner in which Hulda had treated them. And even Gretchen, who was sitting on a bench with her Daddy and holding the baby on her lap, while Sister Mary sat in front with Dicky, felt a lump in her throat when she looked at Hulda and thought that if only she had found the locket she would at this moment be sitting on the throne receiving the homage of the village folks and waiting for the great Prince to come and take her away to a life of wealth and ease among great lords and ladies and palaces and gardens and everything that heart could wish for.

But it was not only this that made Gretchen heavy-hearted, for she was also troubled and unhappy about something else: Carl was not there; he was going to miss all this beautiful and wonderful celebration, and the thought of it made poor Gretchen feel more miserable and lonely than she had ever felt in all her life. It was the first time she could remember that Carl had ever been away from the village for more than a day. He had now been gone three days and he had intended to be back long before this. It is no wonder that Gretchen was disappointed and worried and kept constantly looking off across the square, hoping every minute that he might appear.

Someone had brought Carl word on Tuesday afternoon that an old uncle of his, living in a city across the mountains, was very ill and wanted to see him at once. Carl had not wanted to go. He did not know his uncle; he did not even remember that he had an uncle, and as the journey was a long one and over steep mountain roads, and as the great holiday was so near at hand, he had been inclined at first to say he would not

go. But when he thought it over, and thought that perhaps this uncle of his who had sent for him might be very poor and in great trouble, or that he might have something he wanted to tell him before he died, Carl's big heart—always full of kindness and thoughtfulness for others—would not let him say no. And so he had set out early the next morning, promising Gretchen that he would surely try to be home by Friday afternoon at the very latest, for he did not intend that anything should prevent his being home on the day of the Prince's arrival.

Gretchen had looked for him all day Friday, and when it grew dark and long past bed time she felt certain he must come home early the next morning; but one hour after another had gone by and she had finally lost all hope that he would be back in time. Little Dicky and Sister Mary, in spite of their own joy and excitement, shared with her in feeling miserably disappointed that dear Cousin Carl was going to miss all this wonderful sight. And surely there was now no longer any chance that he could get there in time; for

hark! what was that? Everybody sat bolt upright and listened.

The burgomaster had just stepped down from the throne and was pulling his sword out from between his feet, when off in the distance came the echoing sound of a trumpet blast. "Hi, they come! they come!" he shouted, waving his arms and hurrying off across the square; and the next moment Pretzel came striding down the street, ringing his bell as he had never rung it before and calling out at the top of his voice:

"Make way for the Prince of Burgeldorf! He comes! he comes!"

In an instant all was excitement and confusion. The people began to shout, the band began to play, the dogs began to bark, and children started to scream; and the soldiers rattled their muskets, the bass drummer thumped his drum, and Captain Rudolph fired off his cannon behind the inn and made more noise than he intended, by blowing a hole into Pappy Grimm's pigsty; while old Charlie Potts ran to the church, shouting "Fire!" as he went, and rang the bell so hard that he

almost cracked it. In the midst of it all Constable Bumble ran back and forth, screaming "Silence!" and Pretzel went walking around the throne ringing his bell and saying something which nobody could hear; while above all the other din could be heard the "toot, toot-toot" of the herald's trumpet coming nearer and growing louder every minute.

The burgomaster tried two or three times to climb up on the platform, but each time he tripped over his sword and went sprawling down the steps. At last, however, he managed to step on his sword and break it in two; and then, with the upper half of it dangling behind him and his hat crushed over his ears and his sleeves flopping about below his hands, he rushed up onto the platform and began to shout out his speech in the midst of all the noise:

"Welcome to Olenberg, O Sovereign Prince! Welcome! thrice welcome!—Hi there, somebody, where 's Pretzel? Why don't he bring on the Prince?—Yes, welcome to Olenberg, O Sovereign Prince! The village of Olenberg greets you with bended knee and

grateful heart—Gas and molasses! hold your tongues down there! Hi there, Bumble, keep 'em quiet; keep 'em quiet!—Yes, as I was saying, O Sovereign Prince, welcome to our humble village. Welcome! twice welcome!—*Wow!* Pistols and powder! stop firing that cannon!—O Sovereign Prince, as I was about to remark, we welcome you to our humble village—Hi! get down from here, Angelica! What are you doing up here?"

Aunt Angelica had come up on the platform and tapped him on the shoulder with her fan. "Don't be in such a hurry," she said. "The Prince is not yet here."

"Well, who said he was!" cried the burgomaster, pulling up his sleeves and snorting with excitement. "You get down from here and let me alone! Breeches and broomsticks! this is for all *too* much! Everything 's breaking loose at once! First thing I know, Billy Bowersock will be setting off the fireworks!—Silence!" he roared as the people suddenly began to shout louder than ever—"Silence, I say!"

"Yes," roared back the constable; "that 's exactly

what *I* say—Silence! And if only I had on my old clothes I 'd arrest somebody!"

But the constable and the burgomaster might just as well have been talking out in the woods. Nobody heard them. Nobody even saw them. The people had no ears or eyes for anything except the approaching cavalcade of the Prince, whose golden coach drawn by four black horses could now be seen coming down the street, with two horseback soldiers in glittering uniforms and flashing sabers riding on each side, and followed by several more, all mounted on coal-black steeds. Riding ahead, dressed in a magnificent uniform, was the Baron von Dunderkrout, holding his gleaming sword straight up in front of him; while at some little distance in advance came the herald, clothed all in scarlet, mounted on a milk-white horse and blowing a golden trumpet.

It was exactly noon when this magnificent procession of horses and soldiers and golden coach came into the square and halted in front of the throne. The band had stopped playing and the people had stopped

shouting. Nobody now had time or thought for anything else but to look and look and feast their eyes on the marvelous spectacle before them, and wait for the supreme moment when the Prince would step out of the coach. They could not see him at once, for the great coach, all glittering with gold and ornamented with the Prince's coat of arms, was tightly closed, except for a small window on either side; and the only glimpse the people got of him was a beautiful white feather that they could see now and then through the glass of the window.

Some of the little boys thought at first that the grand-looking footman, perched up on the seat at the back of the coach, was the Prince; but when he jumped down and stood with folded arms by the door, they knew they had made a mistake; although they still thought he must be a nobleman of some kind.

As soon as the procession stopped, the Baron von Dunderkrout leaped from his horse, and bowing very low invited Hulda to come down and show him the locket that should prove her to be the rightful princess.

With great dignity Hulda came down the steps and handed him the locket, and as soon as he had examined it he bowed again—this time lower than before,—and taking a diamond coronet from a box he carried in his hand he placed it on her head, saying aloud as he did so:

"I do hereby proclaim you the Princess Diana Victoria Theresa, bride-elect of His Imperial Highness the Exalted Prince of Burgeldorf."

As he pronounced these words the herald blew a blast on his trumpet, the footman opened the door of the coach, each of the soldiers raised his saber to his helmet, and the Baron von Dunderkrout, taking off his magnificent hat with a great waving bow, cried out in a loud voice, "Behold His Highness the Exalted Prince of Burgeldorf!"

And then—

For a moment there was not a sound. Everybody seemed to have lost his tongue. The people of Olenberg had become accustomed to ordinary surprises by this time, but here was a surprise that actually took

their breath away. They simply could not believe their own eyes. It was positively astounding. There, instead of the grand, handsome young man they had all expected to see, stood a little humpback dwarf, old and wrinkled and baldheaded, with wobbly bow legs, and a most hideous, flat-nose face, blinking and grinning and showing his ugly teeth!

CHAPTER X

HURRAH!

It is no wonder the people simply stared and gasped and were too much astonished to say anything or do anything. Was this really the great Prince of Burgeldorf? It seemed like a nightmare. Indeed, dressed as he was in a red uniform and a big plumed hat held by a strap under his chin, and with a cute little sword hanging by his side, most of the children thought at first he was a hand organ monkey. And, really, he did look more like a monkey than like a prince.

For a moment he stood blinking in the sun. Then he suddenly spied Hulda standing by the throne. "Ha, ha!" he cried in a sharp, squeaky voice, "the Princess Diana!" and with a funny little bow he hopped toward her and put out his thin, claw-like hand to take hold of her.

But Hulda shrank back, all pale and trembling.

"Don't touch me!" she cried. "Go away! I will not marry you! It is all a mistake: I am not the Princess! I am not the Princess!" and she put out her hands to push him away.

At first he stopped and stared at her. Then he turned and winked at the Baron and his face broke out into a grin that reached from ear to ear. "Ha, ha!" he laughed, giving a sudden jump at Hulda and grabbing one of her wrists, "it 's all a mistake, is it? We 'll see about that. I fear me it is too late now to be making excuses; so come along!" and he started to pull her toward the coach.

"Let me go!" she screamed, struggling to pull back. "I tell you I am not the Princess! This locket is not mine! I stole it! It belongs to somebody else! I am not the Princess!" and with a desperate effort she jerked herself free from his clutch.

"Oh, ho!" he chuckled, "what 's that, what 's that—you are not the Princess? A likely story indeed! Why all these diamonds and this bridal gown and this coronet upon your head if you are not the Princess? Ho, ho,

Your Highness, don't be telling falsehoods because I am not as pretty as you expected your Prince to be!"

"I am not telling falsehoods!" shouted Hulda, interrupting him. "It 's the truth: I am not the Princess! Oh, won't somebody help me!" she cried, looking wildly about her and wringing her hands. "Don't let him take me away!"

But nobody seemed willing to interfere. In fact, everyone was too much excited and befuddled to do anything; and, besides that, nobody, excepting perhaps Gretchen, felt very sorry for Hulda, anyhow. Indeed, most of them were not thinking about her at all. They were too busy thinking about this little monkey of a dwarf and their own surprise and disappointment, while all of the foster girls were hugging themselves with joy that they had been lucky enough not to own the locket.

The Baron von Dunderkrout held up his hand. "Silence!" he commanded, speaking to Hulda. "If that locket is not yours, tell us whose it is! Does not

Your Highness command that she shall do so?" he added, bending over and addressing the dwarf.

"Yes," replied that little wrinkled old creature in his squeaky voice, "tell us this very instant who the real

Princess is!" and he looked so ferocious and so hideously ugly as he stood on his wobbly little legs beside the Baron, that many of the people actually shuddered.

Hulda cast her eye quickly over the crowd of village folks, and then, pointing suddenly with her finger, she cried out: "There she is! Gretchen is the Princess!"

Everybody gasped and turned and looked at Gretchen. For a moment everything grew perfectly quiet. It was the sort of stillness that comes before a thunder storm. Then quickly, swelling up from all directions, came murmurs and exclamations and excited whispers, as Hulda began to confess to the Baron what she had done; telling him how she had stolen the locket from Gretchen's box and had passed herself off as the Princess. She stammered and sobbed and hung her head as she spoke (not at all like the proud and haughty person she had been only a little while ago), and not everybody could hear her; but those who were near quickly repeated her words to those about them, and as the people heard the story they could scarcely believe their ears. As naughty a girl as Hulda had always been, they would never have suspected her of anything quite so outrageous as this. And now all at once

to learn in this unexpected manner how shamefully they had all been deceived and that Gretchen—their dearly loved Gretchen—was the real Princess, and that she instead of Hulda would now have to marry the Prince—it was, indeed, almost too exciting. It almost stunned them.

And while all this agitation was going on about her, Gretchen sat perfectly still and stared straight ahead of her as though she were in a dream. She did not hear her Daddy or Sister Mary speak to her, nor feel little Dicky pat her hand. She did not have thought for anything except the wonderful fact that she was the Princess after all. It was all so sudden, so unexpected, so bewildering, that she was completely dazed and overcome with emotion. Only little by little was she able to collect her senses and hear again what was going on about her. Then suddenly her face grew pale and she thought she was going to faint. She realized all at once what it meant to be the Princess. There, only a few yards in front of her, was the hideous old humpback! For a second or two she really thought she

must be dreaming and that this was a nightmare she was having. She felt as though she wanted to scream, to call out, to get up and run away, but something seemed to hold her fast in her place and keep her lips tightly shut. "Oh," she thought, "if only Carl was here! He would help me; he would not let that horrible Prince take me away! If only he would come! If only he would come!"

Then all at once she heard the Baron speaking. He was speaking to her. Without having heard what he said she stood up and tried to smile. She saw him coming toward her, carrying the beautiful coronet that he had taken from Hulda, and before she quite knew what was happening he had placed it in her hands, saying as he did so, "When a real Princess is crowned, no one is fit to place the coronet upon her head except only Her Highness, the gracious Princess herself."

At this fine speech the people all applauded with a tremendous noise, and waving their hats and handkerchiefs they cried out, "Bravo! bravo! Three cheers for Gretchen! Long live the real Princess Diana!"

But the Baron held up his hand for silence; and standing beside Gretchen, who still held the coronet in her hands and was doing her very best to smile and look pleased, he said in a loud, clear voice: "Good people of Olenberg, I have a few words to speak to you. You have all been deceived by a very singular mistake. But at the same time it has proved to be a most fortunate mistake. When this little gentleman got out of the coach, Hulda and all of you mistook him for the Prince. But he is not the Prince. He is Major Sniggelfritz, chief usher to the Prince, a gentleman whose duty it is to introduce strangers to his noble master. However, as I said a moment ago, it is very fortunate that you did mistake him, for it has been the means of discovering Hulda's trickery and revealing to us the real Princess Diana. Major Sniggelfritz will now, therefore, escort Her Highness the Princess Diana of Trexelheim and present her to His Gracious Highness the Exalted and Imperial Prince of Burgeldorf."

At a sign from the Baron, Gretchen placed the coronet on her head; and Major Sniggelfritz, holding his

hand high in the air, was about to lead her forward, when the Prince, who had remained concealed all this time in the back part of the coach, now finally stepped out and faced the people.

Ah, here was a prince indeed! Here was the sort of nobleman they had pictured to themselves. In fact, he went beyond their most romantic expectations. They had not imagined that he would be quite so tall and quite so handsome and quite so splendidly straight and big-shouldered; and although his clothes were not as gorgeous as those of either the Baron or the Major and he did not even carry a sword, he was none the less superbly elegant in his tight-fitting scarlet coat and breeches and high-top shining boots, his magnificent black-plumed hat, and the beautiful cream-colored, embroidered cape that hung from one of his shoulders. There was nothing wanting; he looked every inch a man, a nobleman, a soldier. And without stopping to ask whether it was the proper way to greet a prince, the village folks burst out into great shouts of admiration and clapped their hands and thumped their canes, to express their overflowing delight and satisfaction.

But scarcely had the Prince bowed and smiled, when the people suddenly stopped their applause. Their hands fell limply by their sides, their canes dropped to the ground, their mouths fell open, their eyes seemed ready to pop from their heads, and like a lot of bumpkins that had lost their tongues they simply stared and stared and stared.

Gretchen was the first to find her senses. Forgetting who she was or where she was, she suddenly let go of Major Sniggelfritz's hand and with her face all aflame with joy and wonderful surprise she sprang forward and threw her arms around the Prince's neck and kissed him first on one cheek and then on the other, right out there in the public square, in front of everybody.

"*Why, it's Cousin Carl!*" shouted little Dicky. And, indeed, that is really who it was.

If it had not been that this was such a pleasant surprise, most of the village people—especially the older folks—could not have stood it; they had already had too much excitement for one day. Even as it was, old Mammy Grimm fell over in a faint, and Constable Bumble made such a strange noise when he tried to speak, that those who were near him thought he was going to have a chill.

The burgomaster, too, was quite red in the face, and stood up on his little platform, puffing and snorting in a most alarming manner and muttering something that sounded like "Fits and convulsions!" But nobody paid any attention to anybody else. Children shouted and jumped up and down; some of the women cried, and others got up on benches and wiggled their hands and said "O dear me! what does it mean? how can it be?" Several members of the band began to play, each one choosing his own tune; the men shook hands with one another and laughed and coughed; the boys shouted out at the top of their voices, "Hurrah for Carl! Bully for Carl!" Old Pretzel rang his bell

and sang out to the burgomaster in a high-pitched voice,

> *"What does this mean, you puffy dunce,*
> *That Carl 's a nabob all at once?"*

and there is no telling where the noise and commotion would have ended had not Captain Rudolph suddenly fired off his cannon.

The momentary silence that followed gave Baron von Dunderkrout a chance to speak, and in a very few words he explained the matter to the villagers. He told them that the old Prince of Burgeldorf who had intended coming to the village to seek his bride had been taken suddenly ill four days ago and had sent to the village for his nephew Carl. Carl, it seems, had never known that his father had been a brother of the Prince's, nor had it been intended that he ever should know it, for his father had been stripped of all his titles and his property and banished from the country for having fought against his eldest brother, the Prince

of Burgeldorf, in trying to establish a republic. But when the old Prince knew he was about to die he repented of having treated his brother in that manner, and as he had no children of his own to whom to leave his property and title, he sent for Carl, to see what sort of a young man he might be, and he was at once so greatly pleased with him that he then and there willed that Carl should be his successor, on condition that Carl would go to the village on Saturday as he himself had planned to do, and marry the Princess Diana of Trexelheim. And the old Prince having died the next day, Carl at once undertook to carry out his uncle's wishes by ordering that the arrangements for visiting the village should go forward exactly as the old Prince had planned; and now, this having been done, the new Prince was here in their midst and would speak for himself.

The Baron had hardly finished before the applause broke out more vociferously than ever, and there were cries for a speech from "Prince Carl."

While the Baron was talking Carl had led Gretchen

up on the pretty platform in the center of the square, and having seated her on the throne he turned now and bowed and held up his hand to indicate that he was about to speak; and at once everyone became quiet.

"Good friends and neighbors," he began, "I can't make a speech. I only want to tell you how happy I am to be back in Olenberg again and how very, very happy I am that you should give me such a welcome. And I want to tell you right away that I am always going to live in Olenberg and that I don't want any one of you to feel the least bit different toward me because I happen all at once to have had a promotion from woodchopper to prince. I want to live among you exactly as I always have and I want you to think of me and to treat me just as you have always done."

"Oh, oh!" cried several voices at once; "but surely we must call you Prince Carl."

"All right," he answered, with a merry laugh, "call me Prince Carl if you like; but that 's all. I don't want any bowing and scraping and keeping silence while I am about. I won't stay here if you are going

to act that way; and I am sure Gretchen would not want to, either. We will be married in October, when I am twenty-one, just as we have all along planned to be, and I want to feel that you are always going to be the same good, dear friends and neighbors that you have been all my life, and I promise you that we shall be the same Carl and Gretchen that you have always known; and Gretchen says so too; don't you, Gretchen?"

Gretchen nodded her head and smiled and blushed so sweetly and looked so truly lovely in her plain white frock and the sparkling coronet upon her golden hair, that the people could hardly keep back their tears for very joy and admiration of her.

"And now," added Carl, "the Baron von Dunderkrout and Major Sniggelfritz are obliged to return to the city at once; but Gretchen and I are going to remain here and dance with the rest of you on the village green." So saying, he offered Gretchen his arm, and together they walked slowly down from the platform and stood at the foot of the steps in the center of the square.

Then indeed there was clapping of hands, and everybody declared that this was the happiest hour the villagers had ever known and that they would n't have missed it for a million gulden. And in the midst of the applause Baron von Dunderkrout and Major Sniggelfritz prepared to depart. After saluting the Prince and the Princess, the Baron mounted his horse and the little Major hopped into the coach; the trumpeter sounded his horn, the soldiers wheeled their horses about, the coach door was slammed shut, the footman clambered up to his seat, the coachman cracked his whip, and while the band played and the villagers hurrahed and the dogs barked and Charlie Potts rang the church bell, the grand procession of soldiers, horses and golden coach went galloping out of the square and up the street toward the mountains.

While this was going on, Gretchen slipped her hand into Carl's. "Oh, I am so, so happy," she whispered. "And are we really going to stay right here in dear, dear Olenberg after we are married, and we won't have to go and live in some big, old palace far away from here?"

"No," answered Carl, "we are going to stay right here, at home, all the rest of our lives. And where do you think we are going to live?"

"In my fairy home on the hill," replied Gretchen, her eyes dancing with joy.

"Yes," said Carl, "that is the very place. How did you guess it?"

"Oh, I just knew it," responded Gretchen, clapping her hands. "I knew it would be mine some day! I knew it! I knew it! Oh, I am so happy, Carl! so, so happy! But, O Carl! supposing you had n't discovered that I was the Princess?"

"Oh, but I felt all along that you must be the Princess," answered Carl. "I never did believe Hulda's story, and I just seemed to know that something would happen to show that the locket really belonged to you."

"But supposing you had n't found out?" asked Gretchen.

"Then we would have gone on and got married just the same," replied Carl.

"Oh, but you could n't have done that," said Gretchen; "because, if Hulda was supposed to be the Princess you would have had to marry her or you could n't be the Prince."

"Yes, I know that," said Carl; "but I would a thousand times rather have remained a village woodchopper and had my own dear Gretchen, than be a prince and marry the richest princess in the world."

Gretchen thought this was the most beautiful speech she had ever heard, but before she could say so someone suddenly ran up to her and took both her hands in hers. It was Hulda, dressed in her simple village clothes. She had rushed home, and, taking off all the fine garments she had worn during the morning, had put on one of her plainest frocks and hurried back to the square; and now, with the tears running down her cheeks as she knelt in front of Gretchen and hung her head, she sobbed out, "O Gretchen, dear, can you ever, ever forgive me?"

Gretchen raised her up and kissed her. "Yes,

Hulda," she said sweetly, "I do forgive you; and we will always be good friends after this, won't we?"

But there was no opportunity for any more talk between them, for by this time all the villagers—men, women, boys and girls—were crowding about, to shake hands and offer congratulations and tell how their breath had been taken away with surprise and astonishment. The men slapped Carl on the back and the women hugged Gretchen and the children capered joyously about begging to be lifted up that they might kiss the Prince and Princess, and altogether everybody was perfectly overjoyed and could not think of anything but how happy they all were. The burgomaster forgot all about his speech, Pretzel forgot about his ode, Pappy Grimm forgot to take off his hat, Bumble forgot that he was the constable and did not seem to hear the tremendous racket the boys were making, the foster maidens forgot that they had ever looked for a locket, Aunt Angelica forgot all the court manners she once knew and gave Carl a rousing, old-fashioned country kiss, and, in short, everybody forgot

how to behave or just what to say. And Carl and Gretchen themselves quite forgot that they were anything more than simple village folks, until the burgomaster suddenly clapped his hands for silence and called out:

"Garters and fiddlesticks! Enough of this hubbub and hullabaloo! Remember that we are in the presence of nobility! Avaunt there, Billy Bowersock, and start the band! Music is what we want—music! On with the dance. Out of the road there, Pretzel, you old Christmas cake, and let the Prince and Princess lead the way!"

And a few moments later all the happy villagers, with Carl and Gretchen in the center, were dancing upon the village green, and dancing as they had never danced before; old maids and young maids, old men and young men, children and grandmas, tripping back and forth amid the music of the band and the merriment of jolly shouts and laughter.

Pretzel was the only one who did not join in the merrymaking. He did not feel comfortable in his knee

breeches. His legs looked so bare, and moreover he thought he felt a draft on them. So, while no one was looking, he stole quietly away; and as he walked up Mulberry alley he sang softly to himself:

"O wondrous day, O wondrous day!
I 'm glad it 's nearly over.
I 'd rather live on barley hay
Than always to be dressed this way
And feed on honey clover.
So, glory be! the show is o'er,
The band has played its tunes,
The cannon 's quit its awful roar
And I at last can dress once more
In good old pantaloons.

"O wondrous day of noise and shout
And laces, guns and banners!
O Sniggelfritz and Dunderkrout,
I 'm glad that you have scampered out
With your exciting manners!

It 's more than my old head can hold,
With trumpets and bassoons,
And I 'm too thin and I 'm too old
To stand for hours in the cold
With sawed-off pantaloons.

"O wondrous day of joy and glee!
No wonder I am happy,
For all is merry as can be
And everyone is dear to me,
From Dicky up to Pappy.
I love all things, both great and small,
From doughnuts to balloons;
I love my pipe, I love my shawl,
But what I now love most of all
Is my old pantaloons.

"O wondrous day, O wondrous day!
Long may its joy be cherished;
And may Prince Carl and Gretchen stay
Till Pretzel long has passed away
And all his songs have perished.

And may their lives be always free
And filled with sweetest tunes;
And, oh, I hope that it may be
That they will sometimes think of me
And my old pantaloons."